

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO MUSLIM SOCIETY :  
A STUDY OF SELECTED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND  
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

by

SURAIYA NAWAB

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SUPERVISOR : PROF. A.R.I. DOI

CO-SUPERVISOR: REV. W.C. VAN WYK

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## PREFACE

It is imperative to acknowledge that my experiences as a counsellor at the Islamic Careline, an organization which deals with the personal and social problems of the community has spurred my conviction that Muslim women need to empower themselves with knowledge of their religion. In this way they can facilitate the need to confront the reality of their situation both locally and internationally.

I have also had the honour of correspondence with Muslim scholars such as Maryam Jameelah from Pakistan and B. 'Ā'isha Lemu from Nigeria. This interaction has provided me with enlightenment and inspiration and has truly been a pleasurable experience.

I would also take this opportunity to thank my supervisors, Rev. WC van Wyk and Prof. ARI Doi, who have spent much of their time with me. Their guidance and efforts are much appreciated.

Suraiya Nawab

Islamic Studies

R.A.U. 1996

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

All citations and the bibliography are based on the Harvard method of reference.

All citations from the source text of the Qur'ān are taken from:

Ali, Y A 1983. *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary*. Maryland, USA: Amana Corp.

All citations from the source text of the Hebrew Bible are taken from:

*The Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament: Hebrew and English*. 1982. London: British and Foreign Bible Society.

All citations from the source text of the Bible are taken from:

Taylor, K 1973. *The Living Bible*. Great Britain: Tyndale House Publishers.

Any reference to the Qur'ānic text is written in order of chapter and verse (e.g. S4:1 would read Surah four, verse one).

All citations from Hadīth literature is taken from the text of:

Shah, M S & Jafri, A (eds) 1993. *The 'Ālim*. Maryland, USA: ISL Computer Software.

Any reference to Hadīth text is written in order of volume and number (e.g. Vol. 7-24 would read volume 7 number 24).

## ABBREVIATIONS

- S.A.W. – *Salallāhu alaihi Wassalim*  
(May blessings and salutations of Allah be upon him)
- A.S. – (May salutations be upon him)
- R.A. – *Radiallahu Anhu/Anhā/Amhumā*  
(May Allah be pleased with him/her/them)
- S.W.T. – *Subahānahū wā Ta'alā*  
(May He be glorified)
- A.H. – *Anno Hijrah* or *After Hijrah*
- P.B.U.H. Peace be upon him

—o0o—

Errata:

P.2 Jahiliyyah -

P.30 fathers would not ....

P.44 women

P.56 Uhud

P.99 manner

P.126 share

P.133 were

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

### *Consonants. Arabic*

initial: unexpressed

medial and final: د	د	ض	ك
ب	ذ	ط	ل
ت	ر	ظ	م
ث	ز	ع	ن
ج	س	غ	ه
ح	ش	ف	و
خ	ص	ق	ي

*Urdu and Persian* the same except the following:

پ	ڈ	ژ
ت		
چ	ر	گ

*Vowels, diphthongs, etc.*

short: ا a; ی i; و u.

long: آ ā و ū ی ī ی iy

diphthongs: او aw

ای ay

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

"And the believers, men  
 And women, are protectors,  
 One of another: they enjoin  
 What is just, and forbid  
 What is evil: they observe  
 Regular prayers, practice  
 Regular charity, and obey  
 God and His Apostle.  
 On them will God pour  
 His mercy: for God  
 The Exalted in power, wise" [S9:71]

This proclamation in the Qur'ān has a dual significance to the dissertation which follows. Firstly it addresses both Muslim men and women as protectors of each other which gives each an equal obligation of mutual security and at the same time treats both equally as far as spirituality and worship is concerned. Secondly, it embodies one of the central features of Muslim life, i.e. to forbid evil and observe what is good and just.

In discussing the contribution of women to Muslim society, this dissertation will firstly aim to point out the equality which Islam has given to women and men in society and secondly link this status with the supposition that we need to submit ourselves to God who has commanded us as His vice-regents on this earth to work towards good and to forbid what is evil.



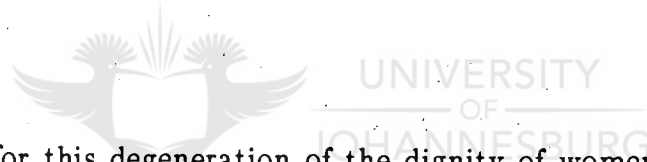
As Khalifat—Allah (vice—regent of God) a Muslim has an obligation first to God and His Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and then to society at large. This obligation is and remains the same for males and females. Furthermore it is the responsibility of every believer to ensure that in discharging these obligations he or she maintains the very essence of the Islamic way of life.

The status of women in Islam has been the topic of fierce debate and discussion in recent literature on Islam. The various controversies and positions of writers on the topic includes work by Prof. A.R.I. Doi on *Women in Shari'ah* (1988) where he discusses in depth a chapter on one pertinent issue specifically, that of polygamy in Islam. Other literature on this topic is *Women, Muslim Society and Islam* (1994) by Lamya' Farūqi, where she tries to clarify the status of male and female roles in Muslim society. Wahiduddin Khan's book, *Women Between Islam and Western Society* (1995), discusses current issues about divorce and the family in Islam. Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Perspectives of a Modern Debate* (1992) focuses on another topic of immense debate on the issue of women in Islam, namely that of *hijāb* (veiling).

Muslim women progressed from being the chattels and property of the *Jāhiyyah* (age of Ignorance) to becoming the mothers and daughters of the religion of submission to God, Islam. They did not have to mobilize into movements of change and strife in order to be accepted as equal, valuable members of society. The Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) has given them this position of honour and dignity.

However, it is evident in most Muslim societies today that this status granted to Muslim women is neither realized nor is it sufficiently implemented. Maryam Jameelah, a dedicated and committed Islamist has written in her book *Islam and Modernism* (1968): "The first Muslim in history to wage a campaign against *purdah* (veiling) was Qassim Amin (1865. — 1908) — a Kurd by origin, a judge by profession and a disciple of Shaikh

Muhammad Abduh who spent most of his life in Cairo. During the course of his French education he was convinced that *purdah*, polygamy and divorce were responsible for the weakness and degradation of the Muslims. The more his French education argued for the superiority of modern Western culture, the more crushing grew his humiliating sense of inferiority regarding his own ...". Qassim Amin goes on to say, "The freedom of women is not based on custom and feeling but on rational and scientific principles. It is useless to hope to adopt the science of Europe without its morals; the two things are indissolubly connected and we must therefore be prepared for change in every aspect of our lives". Maryam Jameelah comments: "To improve the position of women, Qassim Amin advocated a modern western education which would not only enable them to manage the household but also equip them to earn their own living, for until a woman could support herself, he argued, she would always be at the mercy of male tyranny. Modern education would put an end to this 'tyranny' and stop the veiling and seclusion of women" (1968:134-136).



What are the reasons for this degeneration of the dignity of women? Do Muslim women require a feminist movement in the same vein of Western feminism to effect a revival of this status? What about the contribution made by eminent Muslim women of both early and contemporary Islam? These are some of the questions which this dissertation intends to address.

The discussion aims to provide answers to these questions by focusing on the contribution of some Muslim women to society. It includes personalities such as Maryam, the mother of 'Isa (Jesus) for her untiring devotion and faith in God, Khadijah the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) for her constant support and commitment to her husband's spiritual call and 'A'ishah, daughter of Abu Bakr the first caliph of Islam and reporter of many *ahadith* on the life of the Prophet. She also became an authority on Islamic Jurisprudence which is a remarkable feat of intelligence and integrity. The contemporary

Muslim women which are selected for this dissertation are: Zainab al-Ghazzali, the Egyptian activist and female leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Fāṭima Mernissi, the controversial Muslim feminist and Moroccan sociologist, Maryam Jameelah, a woman of Jewish-American descent who embraced Islam for its essence of logic and purity and 'Ā'isha Lemu for her dedication and constant endeavours in the field of Islamic education both in the United Kingdom and Africa.

The lives and work of these women are important in order to understand the status of women in Islam. It would also show that Muslim women have an obligation to God to ensure that they educate themselves and their respective societies about the status which the Qur'ān and the hadīth of the Prophet Muhammad has afforded them. Moreover they must live in accordance with the realization of this status and become valuable members of their communities.

Feminism has been a movement that has touched the basis of societies all over the world. Feminism is defined as "a belief that women should have economic, political and social equality with men" by the World Book Encyclopedia (1987 Vol. 7:71). Saleha Abedin has summed up the Western feminist debate as follows: "Contemporary feminist scholars and activists, concerned with the trials of women through history – their condition of depravity in most societies and unequal access to power and opportunities, often translating into blatant negation of their fundamental human rights – have increasingly turned to confrontational strategies and adversarial positions. Majority of them treat gender issues as fundamentally rooted in conflict and constantly engaged in a power struggle. The assumption in these theories is that differentiation leads to unequal distribution of power which in turn generates social conflict. This occurs whenever those classes or social groups deprived of power and opportunities attempt to remove these differences and engage in redressing the inequalities" (1996:73).

Is there a place for the Western concept of feminism in the lives of Muslim women? Does Islam require a different focus to the feminist ideas of equality between the sexes? The position of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth on this all important issue needs to be explained and understood as well. Society, history and culture has deprived the Muslim woman of her rights and responsibilities and it is her duty to reclaim these by returning to the spirit of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammed (S.A.W.).

In order to present a logical and cogent argument about the role of Muslim women and the contribution that they make to society, this dissertation is structured as follows:

**Chapter One** serves to outline the debate and explain the need for focusing on the contribution of Muslim women to society.

**Chapter Two** discusses the impact of the feminist movement on Islam and Muslim lifestyles. The relationship between the Western perspective of feminism and Islamic teachings and culture is a point of relevance in this chapter. The specific points of the feminist lobby against Islam such as veiling, polygamy and gender roles are discussed here, as well as the allegations from these quarters against Islam as being a religion which denigrates women.

**Chapter Three** uses the two most authentic sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth to clarify the status of women in Islam. It is argued that the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth do not condone the subservience of the wife to the husband. The Muslim family which functions in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth recognizes the value of both spouses and it respects the roles and obligations which each has to play in order to achieve a healthy and fruitful society of Muslims. The Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth stresses the complementary rather than the competitive roles of males and females in society. The attempt at one's social functions according to the Book of Islam is regarded as a form of

*‘ibādah* (worship) whereby each individual male and female acts to achieve the pleasure of his or her Creator, the Almighty God.

Chapter Four provides a concise glimpse at the lives of a selection of Muslim women in order to show that they have indeed contributed to society through their experiences and their work.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation showing that traditional Muslim society has been plagued by historical religious decline and a relapse of social norms as prescribed by the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Social customs and rituals have influenced the disintegration and misrepresentation of Islamic codes of conduct and principles. New and degenerate Muslim societies find it convenient to attribute their un-Islamic practices or customs to Islam itself.

The conclusion therefore, also points out the extreme urgency that exists whereby women need to educate themselves and their societies about their position in Islam as enshrined in the revelation of God.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FEMINISM AND ISLAM

#### 2.1 WHAT IS FEMINISM?

The World Book Encyclopedia (1987 Vol. 7:71) defines feminism as "the belief that women should have economic, political and social equality with men. The term feminism also refers to a movement that works to gain such equality. This movement is sometimes called the Women's Liberation Movement". One of the first feminist books published was written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 and was called *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (World Books, 1987 Vol. 7:71).

The late eighteenth century, particularly the Industrial Revolution and the two World Wars, provided a great impetus to the Women's Liberation Movement. The overwhelming emphasis of the struggle focused on women's rights to educational opportunities, employment, legal equality and suffrage. Women's economic power was realized outside the home when Western women in particular took on the responsibility of employment.

Only once women mobilized themselves into organizations and voiced their needs collectively did it become clear that the feminist movement was a force to be reckoned with. Often the call for women's rights and freedom pointed to the church and other religious institutions as being obstacles to equality between the sexes. Kate Millet (1994:548) argues in an article in *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, "... men retain patriarchal power through myth and religion. Religion is used as a way of legitimizing masculine dominance ..." (Haralambos &

Holborn 1994:546–574).

Graham (1988:303) refers to two distinct types of feminism. The one type he calls 'Fairness Feminism' which concerns itself with equality between the sexes. The second type he calls 'Ideological Feminism' which concerns itself with the liberation of women. The distinction between these two types of feminism is evident in women who have achieved equality between themselves and men on the one hand, and women who are liberated on the other.

According to Graham (1988:304) 'fairness feminism' concerns itself with the initial and clear principle that "gender itself provides no reason to differentiate between men and women in the distribution of responsibilities or opportunities, and the truth of this observation means that the abstract and incontestable principle of equality is made to generate a certain sort of feminism. This type of feminism rests solely on the contention that those who want to differentiate between men and women in the social positions they are expected and able to occupy, must be able to produce some reasons for this. In general, the mere fact that one lot are men and the other women is not enough".

The heart of fairness feminism is gender equality. This type of feminism functions on the principle that like cases must be treated alike regardless of any gender implications. An example of fairness feminism is the argument by feminists that many jobs held largely by women pay less than jobs held mainly by men even though similar levels of ability are required.

The concept of 'ideological feminism' is based upon the need for woman's liberation (Graham 1988:311). This idea of liberation presupposes that women are in bondage and are therefore in need of liberation. Ideological feminism

concerns itself with the realization by women of their inherent potential to achieve anything within the social and political context of society as long as they realize that liberation is based on their ability to perform in these fields. The operative words here are 'potential' and 'performance'. The basis however is the realization of this potential by women and an awareness that leads them to 'liberation'.

The American feminist Betty Friedan portrayed a similar sense of awareness in women in her book "*The Feminine Mystique*" (1965). She argues against the notion that there exists inherent gender differences between males and females besides those that are obviously biological.

The book traces 'the problem with no name': "The mystique" that seems to haunt women into believing that they are different to men. This 'mystique' has no name because it is a deep seated feeling that is persistent in women and it is something which few women can translate into words.

Friedan stipulates that it is only once these feelings of inadequacy are overcome that women will come through as equal members of the human race. In this way they will realize their true potential as competitive, intelligent and valuable members of society (cf. Friedan 1965:18–22). The early American norm of a young woman desiring no more than a husband, huge house and children is not enough to sustain women.

"The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity. ... The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles



in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (Friedan 1965:43).

According to Friedan "Drastic steps must be taken to re-educate the women who were deluded or cheated by the feminine mystique. Many women who felt 'trapped' as housewives have in the last few years started to move out of the trap. But there are many others who are sinking back again, because they did not find out in time what they wanted to do, or because they were not able to find a way to do it" (Friedan 1965:369).

Friedan urges women to 'break out' of the mystique and to fearlessly pursue their aspirations beyond those of housewifery. In this way they would gain equality with men – which is the aim of 'fairness feminism' of Graham (1988). Those who have not felt inadequate to men are the women who have achieved Graham's (1988) aim in his concept of 'ideological feminism'. In this way *The Feminine Mystique* (1965) motivated women to become aware of their dependent position in society and the limitations of the traditional roles of women as wives, mothers and homemakers.

The goals of the feminist movement include the maintenance of equality between males and females and the non-discriminatory treatment of women in social, cultural and political spheres. The redefinition of traditional female roles is the foundation of the Women's Liberation movement. Anne Oakley (1994:574) argues in her contribution to *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* that "Many feminist writers advocate the abolition of gender roles with the mother-housewife role being selected as the prime target. The feminists argue that the family as it now stands must be abolished. This will serve to break the circle of daughter

learning her role from mother, son learning his role from father" (Haralambos & Holborn 1994:574–575).

The regulation and institutionalization of the many discriminatory practices against women resulted in the establishment of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in America. This was the culmination of endeavours by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1961 who chaired the commission on the status of women which was established by President Kennedy. It was a significant event in the ability of women to act collectively (Hagedorn 1983:528).

Hagedorn (1983:161), however traces a counter movement which consisted of those women who were not prepared to sacrifice their traditional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers.

The feminists gained ground on opposing the stereotypes of women as portrayed by the mass media. They insisted on individual rights of control over one's body and of reproduction as manifested in the right to abortion and contraception. At the same time there was a call from the counter movement of women who believed in nurturing the traditional roles of women in the family and traditional values which formed the basis of a healthy society.

Many religious women's groups and anti-abortion organisations voiced their fierce support for the natural propensities of males and females and they formed a strong opposition to the feminist movement (Hagedorn 1983:161–162). The challenge of the feminists, that of traditional gender roles was the main focus of the 'conservatives', as opposition feminists became known. There was much about the new sex roles that was frightening to many women – messages such as "take responsibility for yourself", "you can support yourself", "live up to your

talents", offered more challenges than comfort to many women. These demands of action, self-reliance and freedom overwhelmed women who had not been socialized for them. These calls undermine the very fabric of society, that of family life and as such the conservative lobby formed a considerable resistance to the feminist movement. Besides, the call of the feminist movements for human rights to be acknowledged, would be severely damaged if the individual rights of the conservatives are not accepted.

The question of female subordination to men is also addressed by the feminists in the context of religion and society (Hagedorn 1983:160). Religion is seen as an obstacle to the feminist movement precisely because feminists felt that it was responsible for the stereotypical roles which made women homemakers and men wage earners.

"Women of orthodox Catholic or Jewish origin do not easily break through the housewife image; it is enshrined in the canons of their religion, in the assumptions of their own and their husband's childhoods, and in their church's dogmatic definitions of marriage and motherhood" (Friedan 1965:351).

"Even to a woman of less orthodox tradition, the most powerful weapon of the feminine mystique is the argument that she rejects her husband and her children by working outside the home. If for any reason, her child becomes ill or her husband had troubles of his own, the feminine mystique, insidious voices in the community, and even the woman's own inner voice will blame her 'rejection' of the housewife role. It is then that many a woman's commitment to herself and society dies aborning or takes a serious detour" (Friedan 1965:352-353).

## 2.2 FEMINISM IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

"A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her ... She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household. She makes linen garments and sells them, strength and dignity are her clothing. Charm is deceitful, beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised". (Proverbs 31:10-13)

This is a celebration of duties and privileges of being a wife in the Jewish religion from the Hebrew Bible.

As celibacy is not considered a virtue in Judaism, it is expected that most women will become wives. Marriage and family are an integral part of God's plan for humanity according to the Judaic faith (Koltun 1976:21). No matter how pure and praiseworthy the duties of a wife appears in the quotation above, Jewish women have had major disagreements within their society as well as with their scriptures regarding their status as women.

Jewish proponents of feminism feel strongly that from the silence of the bride at traditional weddings to the problem of her remarriage after her husband's refusal to divorce her, the Jewish woman's position as wife and mother is being severely undermined. Furthermore, the status of women in Judaism which most affects feminist theory has three main aspects; their disadvantaged position in areas of marital law, their relegation to a service role in society and the issues regarding congregational prayers (Markham 1996:240.)

Firstly, Jewish feminists object to the civil laws of marriage, which together with strict dress codes, appear to them to be unfair. This is especially so when the

awareness dawns on them that men are almost never made to feel as subordinate as they are. An example of a Jewish women's sense of inadequacy is prevalent when the rituals surrounding menstruation and childbirth are considered. In Leviticus 12–15 the "uncleanliness of women during menstruation" is mentioned.

This aversion towards women during their menses and childbirth is a source of such humiliation for them in such demeaning terms. It is regarded as a punishment for their experiencing the natural processes of menstruation and childbirth.

The second source of debate in Judaism is the relegation of women to a service role rather than one that is integral to society such as the role of men is (Koltun 1976:114). "No objective viewer would claim that Jewish women are socially or physically oppressed. However, Jewish women have been culturally and religiously colonized into acceptance of their identities as 'enablers'" (Koltun 1976:120).

The third and almost fiercest debate in modern Judaism is the issue of public prayer. An observant male Jew is strongly encouraged to recite his three daily prayers in public. Women however are exempt from the strict obligation of saying their prayers daily. This exemption implies that women often cannot make up the required minimum of ten people for the quorum for public prayers (Markham 1996:240).

This issue is strongly linked to the acceptance of female rabbis by the members of the Jewish congregation. The fear connected to the ordainment of female rabbis is that once women achieve the positions of power within the synagogue, men will feel that the synagogue is not longer sufficiently important to occupy their

attention (Heschel 1983:210–213).

Consequently, these three issues in modern Judaism – disadvantaged position of women in areas of marital law, relegation of women to a service rather than a constructive role and deprivation of opportunities for positive religious identity – are at the very centre of a growing dissatisfaction with the religious condition by an ever-increasing proportion of young orthodox Jewish women (Markham 1996:241).

Christian feminists launch a much more scathing attack on their concept of patriarchy and inequality which is evident in the Bible.

"There is no longer Jew or Greek,  
There is no longer slave or free,  
There is no longer male and female;  
For all of you are one in Jesus Christ"  
(Galatians 3:28)

Although the above verse is clear that males and females are considered equal in Christianity there is a strong feminist voice of discontent. The simple fact that volumes have been written about the Christian woman's dissatisfaction with interpretations of the Bible which make her inferior to men, shows that there is fierce debate on this issue.

We read in Genesis 2:18 –

"It is not good for man to be alone;  
Let us make him a help that is like himself".

This shows that the creation of females was a God given command and furthermore, that her ability to conceive and give birth to a child is a necessity

for the human race. A woman is needed by a man for the essential duty of procreation.

Feminist writers like Athalya Brenner (1995), Phyllis Trible (1978) and Renita Weems (1995) have written volumes in the tradition of the feminist voice. What is most striking about the Christian feminist's debates is their untiring references to sex and sexual violence which they find in the Scriptures. In particular their dissatisfaction with the biblical portrayal of women as prostitutes, sexually inadequate and promiscuous, is contemptible. This is especially the case in the books of three prophets in particular, viz. Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Weems 1995:1).

Christian feminist writings find it abhorrent that elaborate descriptions of naked, battered women's bodies function as a poetic device for discussing divine punishment and social or political anarchy. In fact this obsession with female sexuality has led to the feminist analogy that biblical language and patriarchy is connected to patriarchy and sexual harassment of females in the modern world (Weems 1995:2-3).

The example most often cited as having sexual connotations against women from the Bible is the story of Hosea. He married Gomer, a woman of a highly promiscuous nature. This union gave rise to what is known as the "marriage metaphor". Hosea, the Prophet, is seen as the image of God and Gomer, his wife, as the Kingdom of Israel. "Despite the tendency of modern audiences to see marriage as a poetic device to fantasize about romance, courtship and intimacy, here marriage was a trope for contemplating God's power and Israel's punishment" (Weems 1995:5).

The continuous battery of women and the violation of their rights as women, is viewed by Christian feminists writers as the most potent force of their convictions.

Gender differentiation and role stereotypes are a logical consequence of the female interpretation of the Bible. Athalya Brenner asks about the "case of male fear of female independence, the ingrained horror that patriarchal society feels when faced with female sexuality which is judged to be 'out of control'" (Brenner 1995:63).

In the view of feminists, the Church gave women great praise as mothers but virtually no access to institutional power. Women in the Christian church have been the majority of church goers. However, they could not lead the congregational services until only recently. This is the main idea of the argument to promote females to the ordainment of the higher eschalons of the Christian clergy (*cf.* Carmody 1995).

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, current issues like abortion and divorce are still the domain of women themselves and not the church as such. Secular as well as religious feminists are in fierce debate over these issues which they assess to be clear grounds for the violation of the basic human rights of women (*cf.* Carmody 1995:248).

Judging from the demand for and the availability of literature on the topic of the feminist interpretation of the Bible it is obvious that these debates show no sign of abating. However a most sobering and compromising proposition is made by Denise Carmody in her book on *Christian Feminist Theology* (1995). She suggests that Christians reconsider their traditional categories for dealing with



God, nature, the self and human community, under the challenge of the feminists who find such categories inadequate and even destructive. She also suggests that feminists need to stay in touch with the perennial questions of being, sin, grace, sacramentality and God in order to find profound answers in Christian theology (*cf.* Carmody 1995:150).

### 2.3 FEMINISM AND ISLAM

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity has not escaped the onslaught of feminism on its Scripture, the Qur'ān. A general assessment of literature on Islam proves that the position of women has been thrust to the centre of this form of writing. Middle Eastern studies are focusing increasingly on the issues of how women fit into the conflicting political and social forces of the contemporary Islamic world. This has resulted in both Muslim and Western writers and scholars debating the question of Muslim women in the Qur'ān and the Hadīth against the backdrop of women in Muslim society today.

The emergence of feminist trends amongst Muslim women is the subject of a comprehensive and enlightening chapter in Leila Ahmed's book on women and gender in Islam. "Women's literacy, intellectual and social life began in a period of enormous vitality, during which varieties of feminist activism emerged" (Ahmed 1992:172). The power of the pen was the primary vehicle through which feminist ideas were communicated to masses of Muslim women. Through this endeavour, Muslim women became aware of their voice within the feminist movement. Together with this power to publish came the education and enlightenment of women from their homes and confines.

Women became visible politically as supporters of prominent male politicians, members of political organizations and they began mobilizing their own women's movements. Consequently, the first decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of feminist ideas in the minds of Muslim women (*cf.* Ahmed 1992:174).

Malak Hifni Naseef, Huda Sha'rāwi and Doria Shafik were the Egyptian women who led the initial Muslim women's feminist movements. The dominant voice of feminism, spearheaded by women such as these encouraged the westernizing and secularizing of traditional Muslim society. It promoted a feminism that assumed the desirability of progress towards western-type societies.

Just as feminism and the Women's Liberation in the West evolved into a movement that was applicable to a portion of the women in society and showed signs of 'conservative' opposition, so too did this movement have opposition amongst Muslim women. Whilst the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) became the backbone of Huda Sha'rāwi's feminism, an Islamist and traditionalist, Zainab al-Ghazzali campaigned for women who differed because of their conservatism (*cf.* Ahmed 1992).

Divisions between the secularists and the conservatives became apparent. Al-Ghazzali was tenaciously committed to indigenous Islamic culture and the affirmation of Muslim women. Doria Shafik and Huda Sha'rāwi exemplified a sense of the superiority of Western culture in their pursuit of Western styled feminist goals (Ahmed 1992:205–206).

The initial stages of the development of feminism amongst Muslim women had very little to do with the texts of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, the two primary sources of Islam. It is only recently that female Muslim scholars such as Fāṭima

Mernissi and Amina Wadud have addressed the question of the status of Muslim women with direct reference to these texts.

The issues of veiling, differentiation of gender roles and polygamy form the core of the problems of Muslim women as these feminist writers envisage them to be (cf. Mernissi 1985, 1992). Indeed, many feminist writers see the concepts of veiling and polygamy as a sign of religious fanaticism and thus attribute it to the backwardness of Muslim women and Islamic society at large.

Whereas Fāṭima Mernissi will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, under Women of Contemporary Islam, Amina Wadud Muhsin has voiced a strong feminist approach to Islamic teachings and lifestyles. Her most fierce attack is the subject of her book *Qur'ān and Women* (Kuala Lumpur, 1992). She discusses the role of Muslim women with constant focus on the reading and understanding of authentic Islamic texts and concludes that in order to maintain its relevance, the Qur'ān needs to be constantly re-interpreted. Furthermore, that if the laws of the Qur'ān had been fully implemented in the practical sense, then Islam would have been a global motivational force for women's empowerment (Wadud 1992:V).

There is a contradiction however to Wadud's call for re-interpretation. She maintains that progress in any society is measured by the extent of women's participation in society and the recognition of her resources. This is also the idea in Western feminism as Juliet Mitchell writes: "The position of women in any given society can be taken as a mark of the progress of civilization or humanization of that society" (Mitchell 1975:2).

The Qur'ānic concept of women established over fourteen hundred years ago indicates an advanced level of civilization (*cf.* Wadud 1992:6–10). Where then is the need for re-interpretation of the Qur'ān? Is the responsibility not on the women to return to an understanding of the Qur'ān so that they can emerge knowledgeable about their God-given rights and responsibilities? In this way, Muslim women can succeed in empowering themselves and the global community.

Feminism in Islam has merely begun to rattle the dynamics of Muslim society. It has only recently taken as its focus the global debate on gender and society. However, as with feminist interpretations of the Jewish and the Christian Bibles, the arguments become increasingly directed towards the Muslim Scriptures and their interpretations.

There is a call for more female interpretations of the various religious Scriptures as the volume of this type of literature shows. It is envisaged that these would appeal more to the wider community of women in the various religious congregations. Yet at the same time, there appears a conservative motion from women who do not fully agree with those who propose the re-interpretation of the primary Scriptures in Islam.

Muslim women were liberated from pagan practices such as female infanticide and other female rights violations of this period of time by the advent of Islam. Muslim women remain liberated within the framework and infrastructure of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Islam does not promote the equality of the sexes without due respect for the biological differences between males and females. However, the complementary relationship between the sexes is a fact of socio-religious norm within the religion

of Islam (*cf.* Hussain 1983:16–23).

The reason for this is quite simply that men and women are created differently and they serve a complementary rather than a competitive role. No amount of technology would be able to make us, males as well as females, exactly the same in every possible way. Besides, the obsession with equality in this sense, demonstrates a denial and disrespect for God Himself. Who are we, mere human beings, to change our natural physical or psychological identities and features and create something or someone quite different to what God intended?

If feminism is a movement that strives to improve the status of women in society (World Books Encyclopedia, 1987 Vol. 7:71), then the improvement of the status of Muslim women needs to be viewed with the background of certain key Islamic rites and laws which identify women as Muslims. The following issues are those which feminists most often cite as examples to prove the subordination of women by men in Islam:

- The issue of veiling in Islam.
- The differentiation of gender roles in Islam.
- The issue of polygamy.
- Individual rights versus community rights in Islam.

### 2.3.1 The issue of veiling in Islam

The verse which specifically relates to veiling in the Qur'ān reads:

"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters,  
 And the believing women,  
 That they should cast their outer garments over  
 Their person (when abroad).  
 That is most convenient that they  
 should be known and not molested." [S33:59]

The Surah (Chapter 33) where the above verse is quoted from, i.e. Al-Ahzāb, is widely regarded as one where relations between males and females is discussed. Moreover, special inference is made in this chapter to the honour and dignity which is to be shown not only to the wives of the Prophets (S.A.W.'s) household but also to all believing women generally. The ladies of the household of the Prophet (S.A.W.) interested themselves, during this period, with much community and social work. They also nursed the sick and helped the wounded in battle (The Battle of the Trench in this particular instance). So it is apparently clear that good reasons are to be found for the above verse on veiling to be revealed in this chapter. Furthermore, history shows that it was during this time in Arabia, i.e. A.H. 6-7, that Muslims were particularly being ostracized and brutalized in the area of the Arabian Peninsula, primarily because of the rapidly increasing numbers of people who were entering into the world of Islam. As is common human practice, the women and children are always the first to be attacked and taken advantage of in such circumstances of war and quest for power. It is for these reasons that Allah revealed veiling in Surah Al-Ahzāb verse 59, so that veiled Muslim women could be protected and looked upon with the honour and dignity which they deserve. It further enhanced the concept of a Muslim identity and ensured the Islamic dress code for centuries to come (*cf.* Ali 1983).

Although veiling amongst Muslim women is seen as a sign of subordination to men and as a mark of 'backwardness' of the wearer or oppression of women, it is

becoming increasingly apparent that many more Muslim women are opting for this mode of dress (*cf.* Haralambos & Holborn 1994:548). The styles of dress are conforming to Western standards in terms of design and colour, yet the marked characteristics of long sleeves, longer lengths of skirt and modest headgear have become the fashion of the Muslim woman (*cf.* Ahmed 1992: 222–224).

Moreover, what began as a form of rebellion against the Shah in Iran in the later 1970's, has evolved into a universal call for a return to modesty and Islamic social morality. More specifically, veiling of women, whether fully clothed in black or other dark colours, or the designs of modern fashion in modest resemblance to adequately cover the head and any unnecessary human flesh, is becoming increasingly common. Furthermore, it is becoming common practice amongst many of the educated Muslim females to decide on wearing the equivalent of a veil, viz. a headscarf and long sleeves and skirt or pants. According to Leila Ahmed (1992) "essentially, the adoption of Islamism expresses an affirmation of ethical and social customs. In adopting Islamic dress, women are in effect 'carving out' legitimate public space for themselves and public space is at the same time being redefined to accommodate women (simply because their dress identifies them as Muslim). The adoption of the dress code does not declare women's place to be at home. On the contrary, it legitimizes their presence outside it. Far from indicating that the wearers remain fixed in the world of tradition and the past then, Islamic dress is the uniform of arrival, signaling entrance into, and determination to move forward in, modernity" (Ahmed 1992:224–225).

The fact that the Islamic mode of dress is inherent in the lifestyles of Muslims is a fundamental principle of the argument that condones *hijāb*. Surah 33 verse 59 of the Qur'an clearly shows that veiling was necessary for the protection of

Muslim women. Together with the rights and responsibilities granted to Muslim women, veiling acted as a form of elevation of their status in society.

### 2.3.2 The differentiation of Gender Roles in Islam

In the Islamic context, the family is described as "special kind of structure whose principals are related to one another through blood ties or marital relationships and whose relatedness is of such a nature as to entail 'mutual expectations' that are prescribed by religion, reinforced by law and internalized by the individual" (Naseef 1991:145). It is imperative that the discussion should first take into consideration the value of the family in Islam as this social structure is of utmost importance to the discussion of gender roles. The above definition clearly alludes to a Muslim family incorporating both a nuclear and an extended family system in the sociological context. This position is diametrically opposed to the Western feminists' interpretation of advocating a nuclear family rather than an extended family system. This is especially applicable to the issue of gender roles involved in a basic family unit (*cf.* Al-Farūqi 1994:24–26).

Although the key relationship in any family is the conjugal relationship, Islam extends this system to include relationships with in-laws of both spouses in order to maintain a level of harmony and balance within the community. This interaction with extended family members often facilitates in problems where children of working parents are left at home, when one of the spouses – especially the mother – is incapable of her responsibilities due to illness, etc., or even when there is a new addition to the family.

New voices of change are sweeping the greater part of the Muslim world and nowhere is it more prevalent than in the structure of the family. However, the



move to an exclusive nuclear family system remains an option which few educated Muslims would embrace fully. The development of the semi-nuclear family is the better option because it ensures privacy and yet does not shut out completely other family related structures in the Muslim community (*cf.* Naseef 1988:154).

Although the centrality of the family as a basic socio-economic unit is now being challenged by the process of modernization, it still remains a fundamental part of the religious domain of Muslims.

"Contrary to the trend in the West, where individuals are more likely to look outward for psychological support and a feeling of security, the family in Muslim society has generally been a source of strength, not only in coping with the pressures of unparalleled technological advancement, but also with the various aspects of its fallout known as modernization" (Naseef 1991:154).

The differentiation of gender roles is an issue which points to severe differences in the thinking of feminists and that of Muslim family life. Whereas feminists are adamant that a 'unisex' society is the ideal, Islam views humanity's (males and females) vice-regency (*Khalifat-Allah*) on earth as one where the two sexes have complementary roles in order to effect a harmonious, healthy and fruitful society. This demand for a 'unisex' society, the feminists see as the way towards achieving equal rights for women in society. Feminism denies any role differentiation because they regard roles which are normally related to males such as successful careers, financial security and support and general decision-making, to be the roles which women should be aspiring towards.

Kate Millet (1994:574) argues as follows: "... in a society without culturally defined gender roles, each individual will be free to develop an entire – rather than a partial, limited, and conformist – personality. Thus females may develop so-called male traits and vice-versa" (Haralambos & Holborn 1994:547–574).

On the other hand, roles which are stereotypically 'female', such as domestic functions, motherhood and childcare, etc., are viewed as unacceptable and are sometimes even despised. Islam does not view these responsibilities as inferior or in any way demeaning to womanhood. On the contrary, a woman who fulfills these functions, together with many others that she may be capable of, is seen as fulfilling a very significant role in society. This is one of the reasons why Muslim women are to be honoured, respected and treated with dignity.

Why did God in all His Wisdom, create a male and a female? The answer surely cannot rest on the conditions necessary for pro-creation alone! Males and females have different identities, they perform different functions, they take responsibility for their different roles in society, they provide for different needs and all this is done with the knowledge that God has provided equity between them. The Qur'ān says:

"Whoever performs good deeds, whether  
Male or female, and is a believer,  
We shall surely make them live a  
Good life, and we will certainly  
Reward them for the best of what  
They did." [S16:97]

Lamya' Al-Farūqi explains the above quite effectively in linking gender roles to the family and society (Al-Farūqi 1994:26): "men and women should therefore be complementary to each other in a multi-function organization (the family)

rather than competitive with each other in a uni-function society".

In attempting to value the different gender roles, it is not surprising that the natural, biological function of reproduction which women are blessed with is far greater in responsibility than the male role of providing financial support or maintenance for the family. The former is a God given function, the latter a God commanding one! It is almost as if the one is a duty as compensation for the special function of the other. In the modern, western, capitalist society, is this not a justifiable method of operation? This point is in definite opposition to the feminist lobby as it is clear that many feminists see female reproductive functions as a hindrance to her progress in a male dominated world. The need to find alternatives to marriage such as living together without conjugal responsibilities and even artificial insemination as a measure of eliminating the need for marriage are also presented as modern options. These however, are totally contrary to Islamic lifestyles.

### 2.3.3 The Issue of Polygamy

The Qur'an states:

"If you fear that you will not  
Be able to deal justly with the orphans,  
Marry the women of your choice, two  
or three or four.  
But if you fear that you will not  
Be able to deal justly with them,  
Then only one." [S4:3]

The above verse of the Qur'an is one that has caused much criticism of the Islamic way of life, and of Islam as a religion which oppresses the rights of

women. The fact that the practice of polygamy is an exception rather than the rule is verified by the evidence that in most Muslim societies two pieces of information are true:

- a) In the first instance a higher percentage of marriages are monogamous rather than polygamous, and remain so for the entire period of married life; and
- b) In the second instance polygamy is not regarded as a threat to Muslim females to the extent that they refuse or are discouraged from entering into a marital relationship, i.e. Muslim females are not encouraged to remain spinsters because of the threat of sharing a life with a polygamous husband.

These are the results and conclusions of a survey done in India and mentioned by Doi (1989:66–71).

Feminists on the other hand would find the very thought of polygamy most insulting, abhorrent and even repulsive!

Islam allows a man to marry more than one wife under specific circumstances (*cf.* Doi 1989:52). These are briefly:

Firstly, when the wife is diagnosed as terminally ill for an indefinite amount of time, and the husband is in danger of temptation towards immoral acts of physical need. Also if a second wife can help out with the domestic functions and childrearing which the ill wife cannot do.

Secondly, when the wife is proven to be barren and the couple want to experience the joys of children. Polygamy is regarded as a better option than artificial insemination by donor sperms.

Thirdly, when the wife is of unsound mind and is proven to be mentally ill.

In the fourth instance, when the husband discovers that the wife has been involved in extra-marital affairs or any other incidence of immorality and bad character.

Fifthly, when the wife has deserted the husband.

In the sixth instance, during the period of war when many men are killed and women are left behind in large numbers.

It should be noted that a Muslim woman has recourse to divorce if she finds herself in similar positions to those in which the males above are granted permission to remarry. The first five of the above would be assessed in this case. However, polyandry is not an option in Islam as this would cause havoc in society due to the fact that children would not be able to identify their children and vice versa.

The act of polygamy is also subject to conditions of strict equality of treatment of as many wives (up to four) as the man may acquire. The Qur'an is explicit in this regard:

"If you fear you will not be able  
to deal justly with them  
Then marry only one." [S4:4]

A serious and unbiased examination of the rules and conditions of the institution of polygamy would prove that it is not imposed as a norm, neither is it a preferred practice in Islam. It however has a place in specific societies and sometimes at specific circumstances. This is most convincingly emphasised by the fact that the verse on polygamy, i.e. S4:3 was revealed after the Muslim defeat at the Battle of Uhud in the year 4 A.H. Many husbands and fathers lost their lives and the Muslim army returned to Madinah faced with the socio-economic reality of maintaining the many orphans and widows who were left behind (*cf.* Ali 1983).

It should also be remembered that polygamy was not a practice introduced by Islam. This form of marriage was common practice amongst the people of the Arabian Peninsula long before the advent of Islam (*cf.* Hussain 1983:66–69). In fact, people practiced unlimited polygamy and Islam reduced the number of wives to a maximum of four. In this way Islam laid down the premiss to restrict the unlimited polygamy which was the norm.

Feminists find problems of the transgression of individual rights with the institution of polygamy and they attempt to eradicate it by making females aware of the hurt and anger accompanied with this sort of conjugal relationship. Especially in Islam, this relationship is seen by the West as the oppression of females and the general questions about the condition of women in Islam are asked under the banner of polygamy in particular. In the name of worldwide sisterhood, Muslim women are depicted as victims of primitive practices, backwardness and religious fanaticism. What then is continuous reporting about adultery and extramarital relationships to be called? Is this the indication of a civilized, morally upright society? What about the licentious behaviour which is openly propagated on television screens and in the mass media. Are these not an

affirmation that adulterous relationships are accepted, whilst polygamy (controlled and with preconditions) is seen as a practice which is a deterrent to modernism and the future? Moreover, women in Islam can include a clause whereby they can refuse to accept a polygamous husband in the marital contract which is to be signed before the *nikāh* (the marriage sermon).

#### 2.3.4 Individual rights versus community rights in Islam

Islam regards God as the Supreme Lawgiver and Sovereign who has ordained a path of guidance for mankind. Man is *Khalifat-Allah* the vice-regent of God on this earth and as such has an obligation to act for the pleasure of God through the observance of the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) whose primary sources are the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. The Qur'ān says:

"We made for you a Law,  
So follow it, and not the fancies  
of those who have no knowledge." [S65:8]

The essence of our goal on this earth is to work in the interests of the pleasure of God, by advocating the practice of good actions and the forbidding of bad actions and by abiding by the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) with justice and conviction. The Qur'ān says:

"Say: My Lord has commanded justice." [S7:29]

The Qur'ān further commands us:

"Allah commands justice, the doing of good,  
And charity to kith and kin,  
And He forbids all shameful deeds  
And injustice and rebellion." [S16:90]

Furthermore, justice in Islam is important especially when it comes to community and individual needs and responsibilities. Islam believes in working towards the good of the community rather than emphasizing individual rights and obligations when the communal obligations need to be addressed. The following guidelines are sensitive to the principle of individual rights versus community rights (Doi 1984:11):

- "a) The larger interest of society takes precedence over the interest of the individual.
- b) Although 'relieving hardship' and 'promoting benefit' are both among the prime objectives of the *Shari'ah* the former takes precedence over the latter.
- c) A bigger loss cannot be inflicted to relieve a smaller loss or a bigger benefit cannot be sacrificed for a smaller one. Conversely a smaller harm can be inflicted to avoid a bigger harm or a smaller benefit can be sacrificed for a larger benefit."

From the above it is not difficult to see that individual goals become less important in a community of Muslims.

The interests and welfare of the larger community takes precedence over individual aspirations because God has made Islam not only a form of worship, it is a way of life. The striving for the good of the community is not therefore seen as a repression of individual rights but rather as a process of co-operation.

This perspective of Islam where community rights are seen as imperative in order for individuals in society to function effectively can be compared to the



sociological theory of Emile Durkheim. This perspective is regarded as one of the three major sociological theories, the other two being those of Max Weber and Karl Marx. Durkheim's theory of structural-functionalism can be applied to the Islamic social system in a number of ways. A brief summary of structural functionalism is as follows (Hagedorn 1983:16):

- "1) Society cannot survive unless its members share at least some common perceptions, attitudes and values;
- 2) Each part of the society makes a contribution to the whole;
- 3) The various parts of society are integrated with each other, each part supporting the other parts as well as the whole;
- 4) These forces keep society relatively stable."

Similarly, Islam stresses that society needs religion which symbolizes the common perceptions, values and attitudes of Muslims. The mutual co-operation of parts of society in the structural-functional approach can be seen in the complementary gender roles as well as the harmonious relationships which Islam encourages socially, economically and educationally. Acts of worship and *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) form the rest of the parts of society which are all interdependent and have their ultimate goal as working for the pleasure of God. All these forces work together to ensure that Muslim society remains relatively stable.

This analogy shows that individual rights and privileges are less important to community rights in order for the various parts to function adequately.

However, individual wellbeing needs to be assessed and maintained and definitely not entirely neglected. This would adversely affect the wider community as individual members would not be able to act in a sincere and dedicated manner if they are not properly maintained themselves. This discussion on individual rights versus community rights is important to the discussion on feminism because the feminist movement lays great emphasis on individual rights especially with regards to the specific rights of females.

"Women's Liberation has also been concerned with the process by which a woman begins to assert her rights with her family or with a man. The extent to which she changes her relationship to men varies, according to what the individual woman needs in order to live with dignity and some happiness as a person sufficiently in keeping with her new (liberating) beliefs" (Altbach 1971:13).

In *Women, Muslim Society and Islam*, the following is applicable to the feminist argument: "Islam and Muslim women generally advocate molding of individual goals and interests to accord with the welfare of the larger group and its members. Feminism, therefore, would not be espoused by Muslim woman as a goal to be pursued without regard for the relation of the female to the other members of her family" (Al-Farüqi 1994:25).

## 2.4 FEMINISM AND THE MUSLIM WOMAN

Does Islam condone male superiority over females by disregarding the Western feminists interpretations of equality? The answer would be a resounding "No". The explanation of this answer has been dealt with above, but a few other

pertinent comments follow here.

Firstly, the Western feminists aspirations may or may not be applicable to Western culture, history and life-styles. The Muslim feminist aspirations cannot be compatible to these precisely because of the differences between the two in history, culture and life-styles. Did Western feminists have to change their culture, dress code and life-styles to achieve their goals? Moreover did they have to adopt the culture, dress code and life-styles of a foreign culture to achieve their goals? The answer is obviously, "No". Why then do feminists insist that Muslim women's movements would not progress or display 'change' unless and until they (Muslim women) adapt the dress code and life-styles of a foreign culture?

Secondly, and linked very closely with the first point, is the fact that the impact of colonialism on predominantly Muslim lands has had severe repercussions on life-styles and cultures. Muslim homes and institutions were inundated with the need for change towards a more 'imperialist friendly' manner and this meant that life-styles had to change. The overwhelming pressures to conform to colonialist's types of attitudes and value systems found avenues amongst the Muslims of the colonies. The Islamic Reformists movements further confused masses of people, who became entangled between Muslim ideals and culture and Western influences of 'change'. Furthermore the emphasis on dress code is an effective example as this is a deliberate attempt by Western feminists to show that veiling or '*hijāb*' acts as a deterrent to progress and in some instances even to education. Huda Sha'rāwi, the Egyptian feminist who mobilized the first feminist movement in Egypt was particularly inspired by a French woman, Eugénie le Brun. The latter's influence showed the common European belief that "the veil stood in the way of their (Egyptian women's) advancement, evidently inspiring in her

(Sha'rāwi), a determination to one day cast off the habit" (Ahmed 1992:176). This seems totally absurd because 'hijāb' differs according to location, tradition and life-styles and also because hijāb today is especially seen as an advantage to Muslim women as it legitimizes them pursuing careers outside the home and even attending social functions or any institution of higher learning (cf. Ahmed 1992:224-225). It follows then that the Western feminists call for Muslim women to change their life-styles, and to unveil is uncalled for because these are not issues of contention as long as they are seen in the light of the spirit of the Qur'an and the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).

Thirdly, the Qur'an demands a separate legal status for women. This is a form of equality which Western feminists have been fighting for since Mary Wollstonecraft first published her book "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*" way back in 1792 (World Books 1987, Vol. 7:71). Juliet Mitchell writes about Wollstonecraft as follows: "Mary Wollstonecraft's analysis is a constant view of the damage done to women and therefore to society by conditioning them into inferior social beings. Her energetic analysis is a struggle with which we are still familiar ..." (1975:13-14). The Islamic Law emphasises the individual right of males and females to be entitled to own, buy, rent, sell and mortgage property or other assets that they may possess in a legal contract. A woman does not require the permission of her husband or any other male in order to enter into such a contract. Marriage has no effect on the legal status of a woman as a member of the Muslim community.

Each individual is a separate legal body to the extent that each person is equally responsible for the punishment of any civil offence. The penal laws of Islam are equally applicable to both males and females. Reward and punishment is likewise equally applicable.

The discussion above clearly shows that the Islamic socio-cultural identity of woman is not compatible with the Western concept of feminism. Muslim women have been given equal status spiritually, economically, and legally. Moreover these rights have been granted to her by God Himself through revelations to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).

It is therefore important to conclude that what Muslim women need is not the feminism which Western women are striving for. They should rather attempt to return to the spirit of the Qur'ān and the hadīth of the Prophet, because it is in this period of Islamic history and way of life that she (Muslim woman) was given and granted the respect, equality and dignity which she deserves according the Qur'ān. Muslims today do not act according to their scriptures and in so doing Muslim women in particular have become the victims of degradation and subordination. It is evident that changes in cultural patterns and the tide of history have left these women bereft of their real position in Islam. It is for this reason that scholarship in Islam, by Orientalists and Islamists, are tempted to use the the plight of Muslim women as a marker of the inferiority of Islamic culture (Jamal al-Lail 1996). This is definitely not a true portrayal of Islam as a religion, neither does it do justice to Islam as a culture. In fact Muslim women should become quickly aware of the fact that it is unfair to blame Islam for any discrimination or inequalities which they may experience. They should examine the un-Islamic nature of their culture which has undergone constant change and they should ensure that the members of their communities become mindful of Islamic directives to the treatment and behaviour of women (*cf.* Al-Farūqi 1994).

In order to do this, any form of Muslim feminism needs to embark on a programme of educating women and their communities about what the Qur'ān and the Hadīth has to say about themselves and the various issues surrounding

gender equity. This movement should also take cognisance of the fact that Islām is the *Dīn al Dunyā* (the religion of this world) as well as the *Dīn al Ākhirāh* (the religion of the Hereafter). Therefore both Muslim men and women should be part of the move towards living within the spirit of the Islamic religion so that their children and their progeny can enjoy healthy, harmonious and helpful life-styles.

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## CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN IN THE *QUR'ĀN* AND *HADĪTH*

"O Mankind! reverence your Guardian—Lord,  
 Who created you  
 From a single Person,  
 Created, of like nature  
 His mate, and from them twain  
 Scattered (like seeds)  
 Countless men and women; —  
 Reverence God, through Whom  
 Ye demand your mutual (rights),  
 And (reverence) the wombs  
 (That bore you): for God  
 Ever watches over you." [S4:1]

This declaration of the *Qur'ān* emphasises the fact that Islam regards men and women as being of the same essence. This is a message to humanity as can be seen by the opening words — "O Mankind!".

Yusuf Ali in his translation and commentary of the *Qur'ān* explains this mutuality between men and women very appropriately. He says: "All our mutual rights and duties are referred to God. We are His creatures; His will is the standard and measure of good, and our duties are measured by our conformity with His will. Among human beings our mutual rights and duties arise out of God's law, the sense of right that is implanted in us by Him" (Ali 1983:178). In order to facilitate this discussion on the position of women in the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth*, the following aspects will be addressed:

- 3.1 Muslim women and spirituality.
- 3.2 Muslim women and society.
- 3.3 Muslim women and economics.
- 3.4 Muslim women and politics.

### 3.1 MUSLIM WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY

The spiritual relationship between a woman as an individual and her Creator, God, is one of sincerity and originality. Islam places no limitations on the spiritual relationship between individuals and God besides the all important condition of *taqwā* (the consciousness of the being of God). The Qur'ān mentions:

"O Mankind! We created  
 You from a single (pair)  
 of a male and a female,  
 And made you into nations and tribes,  
 That ye may know each other  
 (Not that ye may despise each other)  
 Verily the most honoured of you  
 In the sight of God  
 Is he who is the most righteous of you." [S49:13]

The root word "*taqwā*" is used in this verse and is translated as "righteous". The word is further described by Yusuf Ali (1983:1526) as follows: "The fear of God is akin to love, for it means the fear of offending Him or doing anything wrong that will forfeit His good pleasure. This is *taqwā*, which implies self-restraint, guarding ourselves from all sin, wrong and injustice, and the positive doing of good."

The Qur'ān does not favour any one individual or sex, especially as regards spirituality. A woman who possesses this quality of *taqwā* may also be the most



honoured in the sight of God (cf. S49:13).

At the same time, the spiritual responsibilities and religious obligations like observance of the five pillars and believing in the Books of God, the Prophets and the angels are just as incumbent on women as they are on men. As much as these religious functions enhance her spiritual awareness and bring her closer to her Creator, so she is rewarded.

We read in the Qur'ān:

"For Muslim men and women,  
 For believing men and women,  
 For devout men and women,  
 For true men and women,  
 For men and women who are patient  
 And constant,  
 For men and women who humble themselves,  
 For men and women who give charity,  
 For men and women who fast,  
 For men and women who guard their chastity,  
 And for men and women who engage much  
 In God's praise,  
 For them has God prepared forgiveness,  
 And a great reward." [S33:35]

The resounding emphasis on "men and women" is most prevalent in this passage. It reinforces an important fact about the equality of males and females in Islam: human virtues are as necessary to women as they are to men. Both sexes have spiritual as well as social rights and duties on an equal degree, and at the same time they both can anticipate equal rewards in the Hereafter.

An important aspect of spirituality in both Christianity and Islam is the situation of the first man and woman on earth, Adam (A.S.) and Hawa (Eve). Islam does not blame women for Adam's first mistake on earth. In fact in chapter twenty of the Qur'ān the father of mankind is himself implicated. The Qur'ān says:

"... they both ate of the tree, and so  
 Their nakedness appeared to them;  
 They began to sew together, for their covering;  
 Leaves from the Garden;  
 Thus did Adam disobey  
 His Lord, and allow himself to be seduced."

[S20:121–122]

It is clear from this verse that Adam (A.S.) had been given the will to choose and he chose wrongly, and was about to be lost in the throng of the evil ones, when God's grace came to him. His repentance was accepted and God chose him for His mercy.

Amongst the many verses in the Qur'ān where women are promised rewards of the Hereafter according to their deeds just as men are, is the following:

"Whoever marks righteousness, man or woman,  
 And has faith,  
 Verily to him we give a new life,  
 That is good and pure,  
 And we will bestow on such,  
 Their reward according to  
 The best of their actions." [S16:97]

As far as *hadīth* literature is concerned, the Prophet Muhammad received revelation regarding *Surah* 33:35 after he was questioned by his wife Umm Salamah about the reasons why men are addressed in the Qur'ān and not women (*cf.* Majeed 1990:201). (This verse has been quoted at length earlier in this chapter *cf.* p. 41.) The verse

was then revealed and consequently God in the Qur'ān specifically mentions males and females as separate but equal entities. It is therefore significant that even *hadīth* literature was reinforced by the fact that spiritual equality is the prerogative of both males and females in Islam.

*Ṣalāh* is an important aspect of spirituality. It enhances an individual's communication with God and cleanses the soul of worldly endeavours. The five daily prayers (*ṣalāh*) are therefore obligatory. They also form one specific pillar of Islam. The other four being belief in the One God and His Messenger Muhammad (S.A.W.), fasting in the month of Ramadān, almsgiving and the pilgrimage.

A Muslim woman is discouraged from leading the congregational prayers in Islam. Although there is no hierarchical structure, females are expected to uphold the codes of conduct of modesty and seclusion due to the specific prostrations and strict dress codes, during *ṣalāh* (cf. Esposito 1991:90). These practical rituals would negate the principle of modesty if a woman stood in front of a congregation in order to lead the prayer. As far as males are concerned, any mature, sane male member of the congregation, who can recite the Qur'ān fluently, can assume the lead in prayer.

### 3.2 MUSLIM WOMEN AND SOCIETY

The word "*ummah*" is the term chosen to describe the ideal society of Muslims. In other languages this word would designate similar concepts like 'society', 'nation', 'race' or 'tribe'.

Women are the cornerstone of the Muslim *ummah*. This implies that women occupy an integral position in society. They are equal to men in the sight of God

and they complement male roles in order to effect a harmonious and fruitful co-existence in the global environment of Muslims.

Islam elevated the position of women through the revelations received by the Prophet (S.A.W.) in the Qur'ān. In Surah 16:58–59, the parents of baby girls are mentioned in order to condemn the crime of female infanticide which was a rife practice in *Jāhiliyya* society.

"And when news is brought  
To one of them, of (the birth of) a female child,  
His face darkens and he is filled  
With inward grief!  
With shame does he hide himself  
From his people, because of  
The bad news he has had!  
Shall he retain her on (sufference)  
And contempt, or bury her in the dust?  
Ah! What an (evil) choice they decide on?"

Contrary to the harmful attitude of pagan parents towards female children, the Prophet emphasised kind and just treatment for daughters. The Prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said: "Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise" (Ibn Hanbal, No. 1957 quoted from Ahmad 1992:137).

Apart from ensuring that females become an important and necessary part of society by condemning transgressions against them and placing restrictions on undue favouritism of males, the Qur'ān and *hadīth* has also ensured that women are able to take up relevant positions and responsibilities in society.

The field of education is one such responsibility. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is reported to have mentioned a famous *ḥadīth* on education. He said: "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim (male and female)" (Shah 1993, Vol. 1:73). The result of the importance that the Prophet of Islam attached to the education of women was that a marked change was brought about in Arabian society. Women who had been looked down upon as mere chattels unfit for learning became the most learned figures of their time. The one outstanding example in this regard would be the wife of the Prophet and daughter of Abu Bakr, the first Khalif of Islam, 'Ā'ishah (R.A.). Her intelligence and diligence astounded even the great scholars of the time. 'Ā'isha is also regarded as an exceptional authority on Islamic jurisprudence and she has narrated a vast number of authentic *aḥādīth* (cf. Doi 1989:140).

The Prophet also ensured that the women were not neglected in his lectures and discourses. He appointed a special time and day for discussing the new religion of Islam with the women (cf. Majeed 1990:210).

The following incident, taken from Sahih Bukhari, the eminent Muḥaddith (person who is well versed in *ḥadīth* literature), shows the great importance attached to the acquisition of knowledge in Islam. "Once a poor man approached the Prophet with the proposition of his marriage to a young Muslim woman of his choice. His (the man's) problem was that he did not have enough money to give her by way of dowry. But he had a thorough knowledge of a few chapters of the Qur'ān. The Prophet (S.A.W.) married the couple on condition that the husband teach these chapters to his wife and said that the man's labour in teaching would compensate for his dowry" (Shah 1993, Vol. 7:24).

It should be noted that just as a male can become proficient in the Qur'ān Islamic Law and *ḥadīth* to become an *'ālim* (an expert in this field), a female can also become an *'ālimah*.

A Muslim woman is just as much under obligation to acquire knowledge in Islam as a man. In fact, the mother being the cradle of education for her children needs to know about learning and teaching so that she can encourage her offspring to become valuable members of the *ummah*.

As far as a woman as a wife in Islam is concerned, the institution of marriage is a sacred social contract which is nurtured by love, devotion, companionship and trust. The objectives of marriage are the perpetuation of human life and the emotional and spiritual well-being of the marriage partners. The conjugal relationship is regarded as a form of *'ibādah* (worship) because the greatest goal that a couple can pursue in their relationship is the acquisition of the pleasures of God (S.W.T.). The verses of the Qur'ān that deal with marriage, shows without doubt that the conjugal relationship is regarded as one of the most virtuous and approved of social institutions (*cf.* Doi 1989:32).

The Qur'ān says:

"And amongst His signs is this,  
That He created mates for you  
From among yourselves  
That you may dwell in tranquility with them,  
And He has put love and mercy between your hearts,  
Undoubtedly, in these are signs  
For people who reflect." [S30:21]

A tradition of Muhammad (S.A.W.) sums up the relationship of marriage beautifully:

"When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion,  
so let him fear God regarding the remaining half."

(Shah 1993, Vol. 7:214)

The family is the basic unit of society and Islam is exceptionally particular that this institution become the foundation for a healthy, harmonious and God fearing community (*cf.* Lemu and Heeren 1992:35–44). In order for this social situation to be realized it is obvious that the marital relationship be sensitive to its complementary and co-operative interaction as a system (*cf.* S2:187). Each individual in Islam has to physically realize his or her responsibility and obligation within the family system. Moreover each individual right and responsibility needs the respect and recognition it deserves (*cf.* S4:19). Consequently, equality between the conjugal partners is a pre-condition that propels the marital relationship. No one partner is subservient to the other in the Muslim family, yet each takes responsibility for the different roles that a social system like the family obviously demands (*cf.* S2:228).

However simple this mechanism seems to appear, Islamic discourses such as Wadud (1992:65–74), Al-Hibri (1982:217–218) and Doi (1989:40) find it necessary to make specific reference to two important verses of the Qur'ān in this regard. These two verses are:

"And women shall have rights similar  
To those (of men) against them;  
According to what is equitable  
And men have a degree (of advantage)  
Over them. And God is Exalted in  
Power and Wise." [S2:228]

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women;  
 Because God has given the one more (strength)  
 Than the other, and because they  
 Support them from their means." [S4:34]

The problems which often arise with these verses is that they imply inequality between males and females. The words appear to indicate that men are better equipped or more in control to maintain women.

However, if the first verse [S2:228] is taken in isolation, then it would appear that males are granted a 'degree' of advantage above women. Yet the Qur'anic injunctions cannot be taken as separate rules and commands. Islam sees society as a holistic enterprise and as such these verses which both relate to gender differentiation have to be seen as parts of the whole system of family interaction. These verses form the basis of gender roles and obligations in Islam. God has decreed that men be the maintainers of women (*cf.* S4:234).

Maintenance here is seen as economic or financial support. Childrearing and childbirth have been the natural domain of women. A huge amount of time and effort is consumed by these functions. Consequently, many women who have employment outside the home find that they have to accommodate for periods of absence because of these functions. Although childrearing and maintenance are completely different issues, the Qur'an does not imply that the one is more important than the other. Both these functions form an integral part of a healthy society.

On the issue of childbearing, Islam generally encourages couples to have children (*cf.* S4:1). Unless medical reasons can be found to deter conception, the perpetuation of the *ummah* is one of the goals of a Muslim marriage. It is for this reason that a vast majority of marital relationships are enriched with children (*cf.*



Doi 1989:129–134). Contraception by artificial means like the pill, IUD and sterilization are frowned upon. Only in exceptional circumstances when the life or health of the mother are endangered can contraception be practiced. It becomes clear then that healthy couples do not have the option of a childless marriage in Islam (*cf.* Doi 1989:129–130).

The stereotypical husband and wife roles are the norm in Islamic society. However, in reality we find that many women find it necessary to supplement the family income due to rising costs in education, rentals and overall inflation. The Qur'ān does not prohibit women from working outside the home in such circumstances. The only pre-condition to any career orientation for both males and females is the provision that these be practiced with the modesty of dress code and social etiquette which are required. A woman's role as wife and mother, who acknowledges financial and economic maintenance from her husband is in no way seen to be menial, neither is it to be taken for granted (*cf.* Naseef 1988:155).

A successful society requires that certain roles and responsibilities need to be honoured by both males and females (*cf.* S2:187). The Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* see these responsibilities to be of utmost importance in order to maintain a stable, healthy society. As long as each member plays a significant role with due regard to the spirit of the sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, Muslim society would be well on the way to the future development of the *ummah*.

The Qur'ān grants men a 'degree' of responsibility above women, not because the latter are incapable or mentally inadequate, but because God in His Wisdom has made men physically more able to cope with the responsibility. The words "*darajah*" – which is translated as "degree" and "*qawwāmūn*" – which is translated as "maintainers" then, refer rather to the natural, biological differences between

males and females (*cf.* Doi 1989:40). This is a fact which no amount of technology or modernization can change completely without going against the desire of God Himself. When the marital relationship in terms of gender roles is viewed from this perspective it becomes much easier to understand the two aforementioned verses of the Qur'ān. It also challenges the perception that Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* condone the subordination of women to men in terms of equality and their freedom as human beings.

Contrary to the relationship of subservience and domination, the Qur'ān demands that the Muslim marriage be one of mutual respect, love and companionship.

"And among His signs is this,  
That he created for you mates  
From among yourselves, that you  
May dwell in tranquility  
With them, and He has put  
Love and Mercy between your hearts." [S30:21]

Khurshid Ahmad quotes a tradition by Ibn Hanbal about the marriage relationship in Islam: "The Prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said, 'The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives'" (1992:139).

The complementary nature of the marital relationship in Islam is most graphically described in the Qur'ān:

"They (your wives) are a garment,  
unto you, and you are  
a garment unto them." [S2:187]

Just as garments provide comfort, protection and security, so God commands both husbands and wives to bring a sense of contentment and support to each other.

The Qur'ān further makes provision for the dissolution of an unhappy marriage. An overview of the laws regarding divorce are as follows (cf. Doi 1989:90):

*Tafwīd* – a unilateral divorce by the wife. The husband delegates the right of *talāq* (divorce) to the wife as part of the nuptial contract (cf. S4:128).

*Talāq* – the right of divorce by the husband repudiating the wife with the specific use of the word '*talāq*' (cf. S2:229; S4:130).

*Faskh* – annulment of the marriage by judicial decree on the initiation of proceedings by the wife (cf. S4:35).

*Khula'* – here the wife returns the *mahr* (dowry) which was given to her by the husband and the couple then mutually agree to divorce (cf. S4:128).

When it becomes self-evident that the continuation of the conjugal relationship is impossible for any reason, men are still advised to seek a gracious and mutually amicable end to it. The Qur'ān therefore states:

"When you divorce women,  
And they reach their term prescribed,  
Then retain them in kindness,  
and retain them not for injury  
So that you transgress." [S2:231]

Islam pays particular attention to the role of the mother in society. The Qur'ān says:

"And we have enjoined upon man  
 To be good to his parents,  
 In travail upon travail,  
 Did his mother bear him." [S31:124]

Khursid Ahmad (1992:140) mentions a *ḥadīth* of Saḥīḥ Bukhārī which demonstrates the importance of a mother: "A man came to the Prophet (S.A.W.) asking, 'O Messenger of God, who among the people is worthy of my good company?' The Prophet answered, 'Your Mother'. The man then asked, 'Then who else?' The Prophet (S.A.W.) said, 'Your Mother'. The man again asked, 'Then who else?' The Prophet (S.A.W.) again replied 'Your Mother'. The fourth time the man said, 'Then who else?' Only then did the Prophet (S.A.W.) reply 'Your Father'."

### 3.3 MUSLIM WOMEN AND ECONOMICS

The right to ownership of property, inheritance and individual financial resources are the economic prerogative of Muslim women and have been so since the advent of Islam. Some of these facilities became available to women in many other societies only as late as this century. For example, the right to ownership of property for a woman in English Common Law required the consent of her husband before this law was changed. The World Book Encyclopedia (1987, Vol. 21:318) mentions in this regard: "Until the 1800's, few women had any voice in politics or economics except through their husbands. According to English common law, a husband controlled his wife and any property she had owned before their marriage". Also, it was not until 1938 that the French Law was amended so as to recognize the eligibility of women to enter into legal or commercial contracts (*cf.* Ahmad 1992:140).

A Muslim woman has the right to ownership of property which is independent of any male interference. She maintains her right to any assets that she may own even

after her marriage. She also has the prerogative to buy, sell, rent or lease any or all of her property without the permission of any male in her family.

As far as her right to inheritance is concerned, the Qur'ān has restored this privilege to women (*cf.* Hussain 1983:21). During the time of the *Jāhiliyya*, Arab men inherited the women of the household including their mothers and their sisters. Islam has included women in sharing in the inheritance of significant family members. The Qur'ān says:

"To men (of the family) belongs a share,  
Of what parents and near kindred leave,  
And to women a share of what parents  
And near kindred leave.  
Whether it be little or much —  
A determinate share." [S4:7]

This verse proves that women are assigned as definite partners in inheritance. However there appears a misleading injunction on inheritance which sometimes becomes difficult to understand. This has to do with the portions of shares of inheritance which are commanded by the Qur'ān to sons and daughters. The Islamic Law which is derived from the Qur'ān assigns one half of the share of males to females of the family (females and males here referring to daughters and sons). This assertion appears grossly unfair, especially after the foregoing discussion which proves the equality of males and females.

However it is important to note that half a share for a daughter does not in any way imply that she is worth half of the son! The seemingly unequal treatment of daughters with regards to inheritance needs to be examined with the underlying principle of the responsibilities of males and females in society. According to Islamic law, a man is responsible for the maintenance of other female members of

his family. In many cases therefore, it is not uncommon to find that a man maintains himself, his wife, his children, his widowed mother or both parents if they are aged and other female family members like a divorced or widowed sister. Compare this to a woman, whose share of inheritance remains hers alone and no one can make demands on it. When the Islamic Law of inheritance is perceived in this context, it becomes clear that it is not only logical but it is also fair and equitable.

Together with the rights to inheritance and ownership of property, *mahr* (dowry) can also be considered amongst the economic advantages of Muslim women. The Qur'ān says:

"And give women their dowries as a free gift." [S4:4]

*Mahr* is therefore not like dowry that is the normal practice in many societies. In Islam, this dowry is not a bride-price which is given to the groom's family, neither is it a large amount given to a daughter by her father at the time of her marriage, as is common in the Indian Sub-Continent. "In Islam, *mahr* is a gift from the bridegroom to his bride as a mark of respect and also as a formal social acknowledgement of the union. It is her gift to keep and it is an obligatory part of the nuptial contract" (Ahmad 1992:138).

As far as employment of women in the economic sector of society is concerned, a Muslim woman is not prohibited from employment outside the home if it becomes necessary. However, her responsibilities and obligations at the domestic level are regarded as imperative and these should not be neglected. If it happens that she is equipped to manage both at the same time, she can pursue them taking due care that she herself is not unfairly burdened. This dual role of women is the norm in many modern, industrialized Muslim societies today (*cf.* Naseef 1988:155).

Doi in his book on *Women in the Shari'ah* says: "The jobs that she undertakes to do must be lawful (according to Islam). She must not work as a dancer, a model, a barmaid, a film actress, a musician or a prostitute to sell her femininity in order to make money, even with the consent of her husband. Apart from these, all other work and professions are lawful if Muslim women adhere to Islamic principles in respect of dress and modesty" (1989:147).

### 3.4 MUSLIM WOMEN AND POLITICS

The history and teachings of Islam give evidence of women's equality with men in the area of political rights (*cf.* Al-Hibri 1982:214). When the Muslim State of Madinah was formed after the migration of the Prophet (S.A.W.) from Makkah, the women participated in the formation of this new state. They had discussions with the Prophet (S.A.W.) who was the political, social and military leader of the Islamic state. In this way women played an important part in the development of Islamic political awareness.

The numerous political wars and battles that were fought in the name of Islam also saw women participating and attending to the wounded. In this way too, Muslim women affected the politics of Islamic society (*cf.* Nadwi 1990). Amongst the many incidents of participation in wars by Muslim women, Afzul Rahmān (1986:72) writes "Umm Sulaim, mother of Anas, went into the battle of Uhnd with a dagger. The Prophet asked her the purpose of the dagger. She replied: 'I have kept it with me so that if any *mushrik* (non-believer) comes near, I can pierce it through his stomach'. The Prophet did not stop her". This incident shows that whilst many of the women cooked and cared for the soldiers of Islam, there were incidents when Muslim women participated in the actual warfare as well (*cf.* Rahmān 1986:70-75).

The fact that the wives of the Prophet (S.A.W.) 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) and Umm Salamah (R.A.) become authorities on Islamic jurisprudence shows that they had a part to play in the political structure of Islam. Legal issues and injunctions form an integral part of the constitution of a state. Many other women too became involved in education and Islamic jurisprudence (Doi 1989:140).

During the caliphate of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb a woman argued in the mosque, proved her point and caused the ferocious leader to declare in the presence of the congregation, "The woman is right and 'Umar is wrong" (Ahmad 1992:141). Here again there is evidence of the fact that women in the early Muslim state were allowed to participate in affairs of politics to the extent that leaders, even those as outspoken and authoritative as 'Umar was, accepted cogent arguments from women (see also Al-Hibri 1982:215).

There is however a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (S.A.W.) which is interpreted by some writers, amongst these being Fāṭima Mernissi (1992), as implying that a woman is ineligible for the position of head of state. This *ḥadīth* reads as follows: "A people will not prosper if they allow a woman to be their leader" (Shah 1993 Vol. 9:219). This *ḥadīth* was narrated on the occasion of the Prophet (S.A.W.) receiving the news that the daughter of Chosroes had assumed power over her people after the demise of her father. This *ḥadīth* is perceived to take into consideration the natural biological and physical differences between males and females.

This issue of leadership needs to be addressed on two levels. The one is called *Imāmat-Kubrā* (Major leadership) and the second, *Imāmat-Sughrā* (Rahmān 1986: 289–290). In the first instance, Islamic Law does not encourage a woman to take on the leadership of the *ummah* because she would overburden herself with the demanding duties of such a position and would then neglect her primary function of



wife and mother. There can be little doubt that such a position of head of state or leadership would leave her with very little time or energy to be able to do justice to both these very important functions.

However she can act as counsel to anyone in a position of leadership as this would be a less demanding exercise. During the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, which was a milestone in Islamic History because it secured peace with the Meccans, the Prophet was faced with a difficult situation when his companions were angry and frustrated over the weak terms of the treaty. It was Umm Salamah, his wife whose counsel eased the situation and the companions then followed the example of the Prophet in accepting the treaty (*cf.* Rahmān 1986:187 and Hussain 1983:142). Rahmān also quotes Baihāqi a renowned authority on *hadīth* literature as mentioning: "Umar used to consult people of right judgment on all problems that faced him. If there was any woman of sound judgment, he consulted her, and if he saw any aspect of goodness and benefit in her opinion, he accepted it" (1986:287).

Although the Qur'ān does not give any direct implications of women accepting the position of *Imāmat-Kubrā* (head of state) the Shari'ah and the *hadīth* discourages it. The Prophet in his remark (*cf.* Shah 1993, Vol. 9:219) that a nation can never prosper if it entrusts its affairs to a woman, refers to the actual effects of this situation. In other words if the affairs of the state are given to people, males or females, who are not adequately qualified or properly prepared for the task, they will naturally, due to their inefficiency ruin the task. Any person, male or female, therefore needs to have the necessary resources and complete commitment to the job of leadership in order to do justice to this important position.

As far as the second level of leadership is concerned, namely *Imāmat-Sughrā* (minor leadership), this involves leading the congregation. As mentioned before (*cf.* p. 42)

a woman cannot lead a congregation of males and females in prayer. However, she can lead a congregation of females in prayer. Rahmān mentions that 'Ā'ishah led obligatory prayers and she stood in the middle of the congregation (1986:289). Fida Hussain also mentions in his biographies of the wives of the Prophet that Umm Salamah also led females in prayers and stood in the middle of the congregation (1983:139).

The reasons for females standing in the middle of the congregation whereas men stand in the front of the congregation are that females are subject to stricter dress codes of modesty. As mentioned earlier, the prostrations during prayers are likely to transgress these dress codes and therefore it is preferable for women to stand in the middle of the congregation of ladies when they lead the prayer.

Even today, in the most developed countries of the world, it is a rare occurrence to find a woman in the position of head of state. One cannot simply ascribe this phenomenon to the inequality of the sexes in these societies. It is far more logical to explain it the way Islam does – that Islam is sensitive to the responsibilities of motherhood and a woman's general biological make-up. This explanation in no way makes a woman inferior to a man, but it does discourage her from assuming a role of major leadership by the fact that she would find it difficult to do justice to both her family and her subjects at the same time.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

The various citations from the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* show that there is no measure of difference between males and females in society. The verses of the Qur'ān frequently address males and females together when it regards spirituality (*cf.*

S33:35), inheritance (*cf.* S4:32) or society (*cf.* S3:195). The explicit use of the words male and female in these and many other verses of the Qur'ān emphasises that both are equal in the sight of God.

The participation of individuals in society is determined by *taqwā* (God consciousness) and the performance of good deeds, both physically and spiritually. The Qur'ānic criteria of *taqwā* includes character, belief and deeds. Males and females are commanded to take responsibility for their actions and they are obligated to the performance of these responsibilities.

This Qur'ānic method of determining the worth of an individual allows women to take equal responsibility in society. The Qur'ān does not qualify an individual by a specific role but rather by the person's manner of participation, regardless of the role he or she assumes. This, therefore, is the etiquette of Muslim society.

The Prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said: "Surely, everyone is a guardian and is responsible for his charges: The Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects; a man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects; a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and of his children and is responsible for them; and a slave of a man is the guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. Surely everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges" (Shah 1993, Vol. 9:252).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOME EMINENT MUSLIM WOMEN

Chapter three of this dissertation has explained how the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* have contributed towards the restoration of women's dignity, rights and obligations in society. These two sources have, since the inception of Islam, sought to defend the rights of women and improve their stature. In this way the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* have ensured that Muslim women are capable of contributing towards a healthy and harmonious society. An appropriate example of this contribution would be 'Ā'ishah, the wife of Muhammad (S.A.W.). Azzizah al-Hibri quotes the Prophet as saying: "Take half of your religion from this ruddy-complexioned woman" (1982:213). Even after the death of Muhammad (S.A.W.), 'Ā'ishah continued to be regarded as a leading authority on religion and she thus played a major role in subsequent developments in Islam.

Similarly, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* gave women a set share in inheritance (S4:2), made female infanticide a crime against God (S82:8-9), limited the number of wives (S4:3) and made males and females equally accountable for their actions (S74:38). These injunctions ensured that women become active, independent and capable members of the Muslim Ummah.

In order to illustrate the way in which women have availed themselves of the opportunities granted to them by the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, a number of women have been selected to represent the contribution of women to the development of Islam. From early Islam:

- Maryam Umm 'Isā, the mother of Jesus ('Isā A.S.). Her faith in God and her belief in the message of His apostle make her a woman of piety and dedication. In this way she is an example to women and has contributed to the spiritual upliftment of Muslim society.
- Khadījah (R.A.), the first wife of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the first Muslim of the Ummah. Her contribution to Muslim society can be drawn from her support and assistance to her husband in his mission as guide and warner, servant and leader.
- 'Ā'ishah (R.A.), the daughter of Abu Bakr Siddique and wife of Muhammad (S.A.W.). Her intelligence and eloquence has made her the foremost narrator of *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (S.A.W.). She was an eminent scholar of Islamic jurisprudence and has contributed to the development of Muslim society through her dedication and love for the Prophet of Islam.



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The women of contemporary Islam selected for discussion in this dissertation are the following:

- Zainab al-Ghazzali, the Egyptian Islamist and leader of *The Muslim Brotherhood*. Her commitment to Islam and her terrifying ordeal in Egyptian prisons serve as an example to Muslim women. She disagreed with her colleagues on feminist issues, rather opting for a conservative view of women in Muslim society. Her activism and leadership of a foremost Muslim organization proves that women can indeed contribute to the enhancement of Muslim society.
- Fatima Mernissi, the Moroccan scholar and voice of feminism in Islam. She has sparked controversy with her writings and in this way has opened avenues for research and intelligent debate amongst Muslim women. She challenges Western as well as

Islamic theories on women and in this way clarifies issues about the status of women in Muslim society.

- Maryam Jameelah, a Jewish convert to Islam. Her complete commitment and forthright attitude has allowed Muslims to critically evaluate their position in Islam as well as in Western society. She strongly believes that Muslims need not be apologetic on behalf of their religion about any socio-political issues. Her bold attitude in this regard lends credibility to her being chosen for her contribution to Muslim society.
- B. 'Ā'isha Lemu is an ardent scholar of education and Islamic teaching. She has written a number of books on the methodology of Islamic studies which are popular both in North West Africa and the United Kingdom. Her recognition that Muslim youth should understand Islam before they practice it, is remarkable. Her contribution to Muslim society as an educationist and proponent of Islamic ideology is impressive and pertinent for the present and future generations of Muslims.

As far as the topic of this dissertation is concerned it should be noted that the autobiographical material obtained from Maryam Jameelah and B. 'Ā'isha Lemu were in the form of direct correspondence through letters and facsimiles. They are authentic versions from the women themselves and reference to these should be considered significant to the lives and work of these women.

#### 4.1 WOMEN OF EARLY ISLAM

##### 4.1.1 Maryam Umm 'Isā

It may appear strange that the life of Maryam is mentioned under the heading of women of early Islam. It is common knowledge that Christianity preceded Islam

as a religion and that Maryam is the mother of 'Isā (Jesus). The obvious question which follows then is, how can Maryam be considered a great woman of early Islam?

The primary, authentic sources of Islam are the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. We therefore find that in the case of the prophets, from Adam to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and up to the final prophet Muhammad, the Qur'ān makes mention of them. Jesus is called 'Isā ibn Maryam (Jesus son of Mary). The Qur'ān has honoured Mary by naming an entire chapter after her (Surah Maryam, Chapter 19). This reference to 'Isā and Maryam is used sixteen times in the Qur'ān. (See Qur'ān, S2:87; S2:253; S3:45; S4:157; S4:171; S5:46; S5:78; S5:110; S5:112; S5:114; S5:116; S19:134; S33:7; S57:27; S61:6; S61:14.)

The name of the prophet 'Isā appears on its own in the Qur'ān only nine times. (See Qur'ān, S2:136; S3:52; S3:55; S3:59; S3:84; S4:163; S6:85; S42:13; S43:63.)

As far as *ḥadīth* literature is concerned, the most appropriate saying of the Prophet (S.A.W.) regarding Maryam is as follows: "Amongst the leaders of the women in Paradise are 'Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh; Khadījah, the wife of the Prophet; Fātimah, daughter of Muhammad; and Maryam, the mother of 'Isā" (Shah 1993, Vol. 4:643).

The Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* regard Maryam as part of Islam. More significantly though is the fact that her miraculous experiences and her overall disposition are worthy examples not only to Muslim women but to women of all religions.

The Qur'ān says:

"And Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān,  
Who guarded her chastity; and  
We breathed into (her body)  
Of Our Spirit; and she testified  
to the truth of the words of her Lord  
And of His revelations,  
And was one of the devout (servants)." [S46:12]

Maryam was the daughter of 'Imrān. Her mother was known as Hanna. Maryam bint 'Imrān came from a priestly descent. The Qur'ān says:

"God did choose Adam and Noah,  
The family of Abraham, and  
the family of 'Imrān above all people." [S3:33]

Yusuf 'Alī mentions: "Maryam was one of the special women who have the honour of being granted paradise in the Hereafter. Together with 'Āsiyah the wife of Pharaoh, Khadījah (R.A.), the beloved wife of Muhammad (S.A.W.) and his daughter Fātimah (R.A.), Maryam (R.A.) is promised the highest place amongst women in the Gardens of the Hereafter" (1983:1573). This is also the text of a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (S.A.W.) as reported in Shah (1993, Vol. 4:643).

Maryam was no ordinary child. She exuded a special sense of piety and benevolence ever since her birth. Both her parents knew that God had chosen Maryam for a special purpose. Her mother Hanna therefore devoted her daughter to the service of God at her birth. In this way she was content to seek God's protection for her daughter against all evil.



Yusuf Ali mentions: "Mary grew under Gods special protection. Her sustenance, both physical and spiritual, came from God and her growth was strong and healthy. It was indeed a growth of purity and beauty" (1983:137).

After the death of her father, Maryam was placed in the care of her maternal uncle Zakarīyyah. She enjoyed an abundance of goodness which appeared to be miraculous. The Qur'ān says:

"Every time that he (Zakarīyyah) entered her chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: 'O Mary! Whence comes this To you?' She said: 'From God: For God provides sustenance To whom he pleases, without measure'." [S3:37]

Zakarīyyah was astounded by the miraculous upbringing of Maryam. He in turn prayed for a son whom he could devote to the service of God. As a reinforcement of Maryam's divine birth, the aged Zakarīyyah and his barren wife conceived a son and they named him Yahyā (John).

The special destiny of Maryam became apparent when the angel Jibraīl (Gabriel) approached her and gave her news of the birth of a child. She was aghast with fear and apprehension for she had no husband, she was not married (S19:17-20). In this instance alone the miracle of Maryam deserves a special mention as she was a woman chosen amongst a nation of women to carry the honour of the special birth of 'Isā (Jesus). She was unique in that she was chosen to give birth to a son by a special miracle.

In this regard, it should be noted that Maryam was only one of the many women who through the ages have been accused of promiscuity. This being the downfall and disgrace of womankind, she is unique in that she represents many others in this predicament. However special she may have been, her shame and embarrassment could not be avoided as the people around her questioned her chastity. She stood up for her dignity and God consoled her with the following words:

"He shall speak to the people  
 In childhood and in maturity ...  
 And God will teach him  
 The Book and Wisdom  
 The law and the Gospel." [S3:46-49]

Maryam Umm 'Isā had unwavering faith in her son, the Prophet 'Isā. He ensured, through the Grace of God, that the people believe in his mother's chastity as he spoke to them from his cradle (*cf.* Ibn Kathīr 1980, 51-69).

Once Maryam realized that the people around her did not support her in her divine mission, she retreated to a remote area away from the village. She also suffered the pangs of childbirth and the Qur'ān says in this regard:

"So she conceived him,  
 And she retired with him,  
 to a remote place.  
 And the pains of childbirth  
 Drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree:  
 She cried (in her anguish),  
 'Ah! Would that I had died before this!  
 Would that I had been a thing  
 forgotten and out of sight'!" [S19:22-23]

In identification with the rest of womankind, Maryam (R.A.) suffered in childbirth, but God was not to neglect her. The Qur'ān says:

"Grieve not! For thy Lord  
Hath provided a rivulet  
Beneath thee;"

"And shake towards thyself  
The trunk of the palm tree  
It will let fall  
Fresh ripe dates upon thee." [S19:24–25]

Maryam returned to her people with her baby in her arms. She was embarrassed and scared. The people reminded her of her esteemed lineage, 'Imrān her father, Hanna her mother, Harūn her uncle. They accused her of betraying her family and disgracing her name. Her reply was to bravely point to her son 'Isā. The baby began to speak:

"He said: 'I am indeed a servant of God.  
He hath given me revelation,  
and made me a prophet;  
And he hath made me  
Blessed wheresoever I be,  
And hath enjoined on me  
Prayer and Charity,  
As long as I live ...'." [S19:29–31]

Miraculously, the infant convinced an unbelieving audience that his mother was chaste and pure. They believed then that she was on a mission from God and that her son was the prophet of God (Ali 1983:773).

Maryam bint 'Imrān had absolute faith in God, she believed in the message of his Apostle 'Isā and she remained pious and devoted (*cf.* Uthmān 1990:407).

God says in the Qur ān:

"And remember her who guarded her  
Chastity. We breathed into her  
of our Spirit, and We made her and  
Her son, a sign for all peoples.  
Verily this Brotherhood,  
And I am your Lord and Cherisher." [S21:91–92]

These words are evidence of Maryam as a woman of exemplary character. She honoured her chastity and purity as every woman should. She remained faithful and obedient in the face of adversity. She remains a woman of immense dignity and honour and in these characteristics is her contribution, as a Muslim woman to society at large.

#### 4.1.2 Khadījah (R.A.)

Khadījah (R.A.) was born in the year 556 C.E. Her father was Khuwaylid of the tribe of 'Asād and her mother, Fātimah bint Zāidah of the Quraish tribe (Hussain 1983:88). She was also named Tāhirah due to her impressive and excellent character. Her father too was a man of high esteem and wealth. He died on the battlefield and left Khadījah a prosperous business and all his wealth.

Khadījah was married twice and both these husbands predeceased her (Hussain 1983:89). As a widow she refused the proposals of marriage from eligible suitors for many years. She was pious and was destined to become the first wife of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (S.A.W.).

After the death of his father Abdullah, Muhammad was entrusted to the care of his uncle Abu Tālib, who was anxious for the young Muhammad to be successful

in business and trade. He heard about the widowed Khadījah who was in need of the services of an honest Quraishite man who could manage her thriving trade caravan to Syria and surrounding areas.

Khadījah was overjoyed at employing such a well liked and honest person. The Prophet Muhammad accepted the job as a challenge and he worked diligently to ensure that he sold the merchandise entrusted to him. Khadījah sent along her servant Maysarah to accompany Muhammad and the trade caravan to Syria. The profit for that year of trade was double that earned in previous years (Siddiqui 1982:10). Khadījah was most impressed and pleased at her choice of employee. She saw that he was a dedicated worker and she heard from Maysarah about his pious nature and virtuous manners.

Khadījah noticed that Muhammad's distinguished character and disposition was unusual. Furthermore there was an incident which made her believe that he had a spiritual advantage as well. Once, as she looked out of her window at the approaching caravan of Muhammad and Maysarah, she noticed that birds were hovering over Muhammad's head to shield him from the sun (*cf.* Siddiqui 1983:11). The many positive attributes of Muhammad prompted Khadījah to propose marriage to him.

At this time, Khadījah (R.A.) was forty years old and Muhammad (S.A.W.) was twenty five. Her message to him was as follows: "I desire to enter into matrimony with you because of our blood relationship and the undoubted nobility of your descent, truthfulness and sincerity as well as the integrity of your character and the sobriety of your views" (Hussain 1983:91). Muhammad (S.A.W.) who was extremely shy and unassuming was uncomfortable with the proposal at first. He was too modest to recognize his qualities as compared to the

eminence and success of Khadijah (R.A.).

She remained a devoted and dedicated wife and mother throughout their twenty five year marriage. They complemented each other perfectly. Muhammad was appreciative of the warmth and luxuries which Khadijah's wealth and character provided. At the same time Khadijah enjoyed the fruits of his untiring efforts to protect and enhance their business affairs and maintain a strong bond between them and their children. The relationship between Muhammad (S.A.W.) and Khadijah (R.A.) has a great impact on the contribution that Khadijah made to Muslim society.

Besides Mariah, the Coptic, Khadijah was the only wife that bore children to the Prophet (S.A.W.) They were a deeply religious family. Khadijah often visited the holy sanctuary in Makkah to offer prayers. She became especially devoted after the demise of their two young sons, Qāsim and Abdullah. By this time Muhammad had become uncomfortable with the polytheistic religion of the Arabs where they worshiped the idols Al-Lāt Al-Uzza and Al-Manāt. He had begun to question himself and others about God, creation, spirituality and other such issues. He therefore did not approve of his wife's offerings to the idols but he did not stop her. Rather he retreated to a nearby cave called Hira where he meditated and prayed for God to show her the right path to salvation (*cf.* Haykal 1990:71-75).

The solitude of the mountains became a source of inspiration and contentment to Muhammad. It was here in the cave of Hira that the honour of Prophethood dawned on Muhammad (S.A.W.). The Qur'ān says:

"One day, while sitting in the cave he,  
 (Muhammad) heard a voice saying:  
 'Know, I am angel Gabriel sent by  
 The Almighty God, to proclaim  
 That He has appointed thee as  
 His Messenger to the people.  
 Tell them there is only one God'.  
 Then the angel embraced him  
 into the mysteries of Divine love  
 in the following words:  
 'Proclaim! (or Read)  
 In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher,  
 Who created –  
 Created man out of a (mere) clot  
 of Congealed blood:  
 Proclaim! and thy Lord is Most Beautiful.  
 He who taught the use of the Pen, –  
 Taught men that which  
 He knew not'." [S96:1–5]

Muhammad was overwhelmed with fear and intimidation. Gabriel had embraced him so forcefully that he could feel his ribs almost crushed. In an instant he began to recite the verses that the angel had proclaimed. The fluency and manner of Muhammad's recitations were most surprising even to him as he had not learnt to read before. From this day on, this 'unlettered' Prophet became responsible for guiding and leading the Arab nation. Muhammad, the Last Prophet of God had just embarked on a journey of a spiritual renaissance for himself, his people and for the millions of Muslims around the world. Part of this journey was to be confronted with hardship and hurt, anger and anxiety, fear and fallacy, delight and despair, loneliness and leadership.

Immediately after his experience in the cave, Muhammad returned home to his wife, shivering and scared. He wanted to be wrapped up quickly as he felt very

uncomfortable and insecure. Khadijah tried her best to calm him down and she listened intently to his encounter with the angel, Gabriel. Her supportive nature and constant reassurances did not fail Muhammad at this crucial period in his life. She said to him: "Be firm. By him who dominates Khadijah's soul I pray and hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation. By God, He will not let you down. You will be kind to your kin; your speech will all be true; you will rescue the weary; entertain the guests and help the truth to prevail" (Haykal 1990:75). Intuitively, she knew that great things awaited her husband.

The one person who supported him through all these emotions was his sincere and faithful wife Khadijah. In this manner of support and confidence, Khadijah has contributed much as a Muslim woman to society at large.

Khadijah (R.A.) hurried to her cousin, Waraqah bin Nawfal, a Christian scholar of the Scriptures and asked him what Muhammad's encounter with the angel meant. She was overjoyed to hear that her prediction of the greatness of her husband were true. Waraqah told her of the writings in the Scriptures which told of the coming of the last Messenger of God, and that Muhammad was being blessed with Prophethood (*cf.* Haykal 1990:75-76).

Muhammad was afraid that no-one would believe him to be the last Messenger of God, neither would anyone listen to the message. Khadijah in her usual comforting manner tried to reassure him. She immediately declared her acceptance of Islam to him and in this way became the very first person to embrace the religion. By this action alone, she has contributed enormous praise to the religion of Islam. She declared her belief in One God (monotheism) and in her husband Muhammad as His Messenger. Her faith in his prophethood was undaunted and complete. She lent him unwavering support and commitment



although the prophet himself appeared afraid and apprehensive of his success.

Haykal (1990:77) goes on to give an illustrious description of Khadījah's loyalty to her husband: "It was natural for Khadījah to be the first one to believe in Muhammad. For many long years she had known him to be the exemplar of truthfulness, fidelity, honesty, charity and compassion. In his many retreats during the last few years, she had noticed how he had constantly been preoccupied with the search for the truth alone; how he had sought that truth with his heart, mind and spirit. Beyond the idolatrous superstitions of the people and their sacrifices and beyond the deities that are capable of neither good nor evil but which the people venerated without avail. She had witnessed his great doubt and utter perplexity on his return from the Cave of Hīra after the first revelation. She asked him to tell her when the angel would appear so that she could calm and appease him. She wanted always to be there for him".

This quotation clarifies Khadījah's decision to embrace Islam so readily. Her unstinting support and faith in the Messenger of God was not mere sentimentality. It was the culmination of many years of observing and thinking about her husband's serious dilemmas and meditations. Her decision to accept Islam was her own and she thus remains in the honourable position of being the first Muslim ever. In this way she also has the deserved status of "Mother of the Believers".

Khadījah witnessed the great joys of Prophethood with Muhammad. The acceptance of the religion by his loyal friend and lasting companion Abu Bakr, the dedication of his young cousin Ali ibn Abi Tālib and the conversion of the great warrior of Islam, his uncle, Hamzah. Khadījah also witnessed the anger and persecutions of the Banu Quraish against Muhammad and his followers. The

wrath and anger of Muhammad's uncle Abu Jahl and of the Quraishite leader Abu Sufyān were also part of their marital life together.

Khadijah did not only support Muhammad's mission emotionally and physically. Her wealth and status were also laid at his disposal. In this way, many slaves were freed through Khadijah's generosity and many such people accepted Islam. One of these slaves was Zaid ibn Hārith. Muhammad (S.A.W.) later adopted him as his son and he remains an important figure of Islamic history (*cf.* Haykal 1990:69). Through all those days of triumph and trial, Khadijah ensured that Muhammad had a loving and comfortable home to return to, with their children being in good condition and care.

An incident in the life of Muhammad is often cited by his biographers which clearly shows the love and devotion between the couple. This is how Fida Hussain (1983:99–100) narrates the incident: "The Prophet's love and gratitude for Khadijah was so great that 'Ā'ishah, the young wife of the Prophet whom he married after the death of Khadijah, became jealous of the deceased lady. One day, Khadijah's sister, Hālah, came to visit the Prophet. Hālah's voice sounded exactly like Khadijah's. As soon as he heard the old familiar voice, he startled and said: 'It must be Hālah, her voice is just like that of Khadijah'. 'Ā'ishah, who was with the Prophet, burst forth in a fit of jealousy: 'How is it that you always think of the old woman, who is no more living, when Allah has given you much better wives?'. 'Never better', replied the Prophet, 'she hailed my mission at a time when everyone howled against it, and lent me the support of her conviction when there was hardly a believer. She enlivened my life when I was woe begone and opened the floodgates of her heart when I felt lonely and deserted. How can I forget her? She also gave me children most loving.' On another occasion when 'Ā'ishah was annoyed by the persistence of his fidelity, he

remarked: 'Khadijah's love is given to me by Allah'. After this 'A'ishah never uttered any remarks about Khadijah."

These words are an indication of the undying love and gratitude of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) for his first wife. It is also indicative of the sincerity, devotion, commitment and dedicated character of Khadijah (R.A.), the wife of the Prophet and the "Mother of the Believers".

However, this seemingly perfect union could not last forever. In the tenth year after Prophethood, (three years before the Hijrah) during the month of Ramadān, Khadijah (R.A.) left this world. She was sixty five years old and had enjoyed twenty five years of her life with Muhammad (S.A.W.). The funeral prayers and rites had not been enjoined on the Muslims as yet, so the Prophet (S.A.W.) himself buried his beloved wife and companion. A new chapter in his life had begun with the passing away of his consoler and support. He was most grieved by her death as well as the passing on of his uncle and guardian Abu Tālib, who died a few months earlier than Khadijah. These two tragic losses to Muhammad, made him retreat with despair and grief and left behind an emptiness in him which was most painful (Hussain 1983:105-106). The grace and excellence of virtue which was apparent in the character of Khadijah (R.A.) remains unmatched. The prophet remained married to her for twenty five years and so set the precedent for monogamy being the rule rather than the exception for married life.

Khadijah had noticed the inspiring personality of a great man in Muhammad (S.A.W.) long before Prophethood. The Almighty God destined her to become the companion and support of Muhammad (S.A.W.). He was destined to loose her at a most crucial time of his mission. Perhaps this in itself was a test of faith

and courage which remains unmatched. The Holy Qur'ān states:

"Did He not find thee an orphan and  
gave thee shelter (and care)? ...  
And He found thee in need, and made  
thee independent." [S43:6–8]

The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Never did God give me a better wife than Khadijah and never was there a woman comparable to Maryam daughter of 'Imran, and Khadijah, my wife" (Hussain 1983:105).

The woman, wife, mother, Khadijah bint Khuwailid was truly an example par excellence. She has contributed greatly to the religion of Islam and indeed to the world at large. "Together with 'Āsiya the wife of Pharaoh, Maryam the Mother of Hadrat 'Isā (A.S.) and Fāṭimah beloved daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), Khadijah is destined to be one of the leaders of the women in Paradise" (Hussain 1983:106).

The above *ḥadīth* is also mentioned by Saḥīḥ Bukhārī (Shah 1993:5, 165).

#### 4.1.3 'Ā'ishah bint Abu Bakr

'Ā'isha said: "I was preferred over the wives of the Prophet (S.A.W.) by ten things" (Ibn Sa'd, 1995:46). It was asked, "What are they, Umm Al-Muminīn?" She said, "He did not marry any other virgin but me. He did not marry a woman whose parents were both Muhājirun except me. Allah Almighty revealed my innocence from Heaven. Jibril brought my picture from heaven in silk and said, 'Marry her. She is your wife'. He and I used to do *ghusl* from the same vessel, and he did not do that with any of his wives except me. He used to pray while I was stretched out in front of him, and he did not do that in front of

any of his wives except me. The revelation would come to him while he was with me, and it did not come down when he was with any of his wives except me. Allah took his soul while he was against my chest. He died on the night when it was my turn and he was buried in my room."

'Ā'ishah was especially proud of the fact that the Prophet of Islam only received revelation when he was in her presence. She often boasted about this fact in front of her co-wives (*cf.* Shah 1993:Vol. 5, 119). This above quotation by Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, a biographer of the women of early Islam gives a clear indication of the status and character of 'Ā'ishah (R.A.).

She was born in Makkah, in the month of Shawwal, four years after Prophethood. Her father was Abu Bakr Siddique and her mother was Zaynab bint 'Āmir, also known as Umm Rumān. 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) came from an accepted and pious Muslim family tradition and she knew no disbelief or polytheism since her birth (Siddiqui 1982:26). She immigrated to Madinah with her family after she was married to the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). When the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) approached Hadrat Abu Bakr for his daughter's hand in marriage, the latter was overjoyed and so was his young daughter 'Ā'ishah (R.A.). The union which followed not only made 'Ā'ishah the only virgin that the Prophet of Islam married but moreover, it strengthened a bond between two great friends and companions. Abu Bakr became related to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) not only in the strife for the religion (Din-al-Islam) but also in kinship.

There exists many misconceptions and related criticisms against Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) regarding the age of 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) at the time of her marriage. It should be remembered, first and foremost, that marriages between very young, almost childish individuals were the custom during this specific time.

One cannot but notice the indifference and consequent nature of narrations of this type of marriages as being no more than the norm of the society in which they were prevalent. The actual ages or discrepancy in ages of marriage partners is not an issue of discussion in most of the writings of the time, simply because it was a normal, natural process. Even the subtle nuances of sarcasm and ridicule mentioned by a biographer of 'Ā'ishah bint Abu Bakr, Nabia Abbot (1973) accepts the age of marriage of this woman of Islam as a norm of the time rather than view it as an incident of profound importance on the life of Muhammad (S.A.W.).

Abbot finds it more interesting and pertinent to discuss the compatibility and exemplary lifestyle of the couple rather than dwell on the discrepancy of their respective ages. She says: "The points, in which 'Ā'ishah took special personal pride were such as were hers by virtue of either her birth, the love of Muhammad, or the Grace of Allah. Furthermore they refer, for the most part, to that earlier and by far the happiest part of her life as the young and beloved wife of Muhammad" (1973:214).

Muslim biographers like Muhammad Saeed Siddiqui and in particular Fida Hussain have detailed accounts of incidents which point out that 'Ā'ishah was almost nine years old at the time of her *nikāh* with the Prophet (S.A.W.) and at least fourteen at the time of consummation of the union. The following are the arguments by Fida Hussain (1983:115). When Abu Bakr was approached about a possible marriage between his daughter 'Ā'ishah and Muhammad (S.A.W.) his friend and leader, he was concerned about her previous betrothal to Jubair bin Mut'im. This arrangement amongst Arabs of the time was normally finalized between the ages of three and six years.

Bukhari has evidence of the fact that 'Ā'ishah herself mentioned that she remembered the revelation of Surah al-Qamar (S:54) of the Holy Qur'ān and that she had heard some of the verses from her parents. She must therefore have been fairly grownup by this time. Furthermore, this Surah was revealed not later than the fifth year of the Call. This points to 'Ā'ishah being born in the first or second year of the Call, which makes her age not less than nine at the time of her *nikāh*.

Ibn Sa'd in a report in the *Ṭabaqāt* confirms that 'Ā'ishah was nine years old at the time of her betrothal. Fāṭimah, daughter of Muhammad (S.A.W.) and Khadijah (R.A.), was five years older than 'Ā'ishah, and she was born four years before the Call. This means that her birth took place about the second year of the Call and that she could have been nine years old at the time of *nikāh*.

Fida Hussain concludes that 'Ā'ishah must have been grown up and mature, both intellectually and physically at the time of her union with the Prophet (S.A.W.). The idea of her immaturity and implications of her tender age lacks substance as far as this writer is concerned.

On the question of dowry, it may be interesting to note that the Prophet S.A.W. did not possess enough to secure the bride with and he therefore delayed consummation of his marriage to 'Ā'ishah even after he had had living quarters erected for Sawdah (his second wife) and himself. On Abu Bakr's inquiry as to the delay in allowing his daughter into the Prophet's household he was told about the inadequate resources of the groom. Abu Bakr himself then supplied the dowry which amounted to 500 dirhams (Hussain 1983:113).

The couple lived a very simple existence and had meagre resources. A small hut of clay walls and palm leaves and a few utensils were all that the couple possessed. But the tenderness and love which emerged from this union remains until today the very embodiment of a near perfect marriage.

The Prophet (S.A.W.) did not deprive his young bride of her friends and her fun. In fact he encouraged it and often shared in it. With time 'Ā'ishah became undoubtedly the most beloved of all the wives of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). However, this relationship, as all marital relationships even today, was not without trial or tribulation. Perhaps the most trying time which is always mentioned as part of the life of 'Ā'ishah is known as the incident of '*Ifak*' or the "affair of the slander" (Siddiqui 1982:29). Before going on to discuss this incident in detail, it would be imperative to mention the conditions which governed the socio-political awareness of the time in question.

It was approximately the fifth year of the Hijrah and Muhammad's status as leader and Prophet seemed to have been secured. His home became a popular venue for visitors and new converts to the religion of Islam. His wives had free access to converse and entertain the many visitors to their place of residence whenever Muhammad was busy or away.

There were also an abundance of less enthusiastic followers of Islam often referred to as the "hypocrites" or *munāfiqūn*, amongst the Muslim community in Madinah. It became apparent that some of these people were intent on seeing the downfall of the great Prophet and leader Muhammad (S.A.W.). The one avenue open to them to achieve this goal was to insult and try and take advantage of his wives. When they were reprimanded about their unacceptable behaviour towards "the Mother's of the Faithful" they tried to make excuses by



saying that they had mistaken the Prophet's wives for slaves (*cf.* Hussain 1983 and *cf.* Siddiqui 1982:29–30).

It should also be noted here that veiling was practiced during this time and age, specially amongst the more affluent, aristocratic members of the society (Ahmed 1992:14, 55). Veiling was also widely practiced to differentiate between the social levels which were prevalent in those times.

As a result of allegations by the "hypocrites", Muhammad was urged by his associates to seclude his wives. This seclusion not only became a measure of protection to women but also secured their honour and dignity. It is for this reason that the incident of 'Ifak impacts so greatly on the lives of both 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) and her respected husband.

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) had accompanied the Prophet (S.A.W.) on an expedition against the tribe of the Banu-Mustaliq. According to Yusuf Ali, the Banu Mustaliq expedition took place in 5–6 A.H. She travelled in a closed litter on the back of a camel. On its way back to Madinah the group of Muslims stopped to rest and 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) wandered off away from the main camp presumably to perform her ablutions for prayer (*ṣalāh*). By the time 'Ā'ishah returned to the camp she found that her group had left already. At the camp site, 'Ā'ishah had gone to look for her necklace which she had dropped while performing ablution. This is the reason why she was delayed in returning to the rest of the group. Furthermore, Yusuf Ali mentions that she was found the following morning by Safwān, a Muḥājir, who was left behind expressly to pick up anything which was inadvertently left behind. He put 'Ā'ishah on his camel and led her back to Madinah on foot. This gave occasion for the enemies of Islam, to raise a malicious scandal (Ali 1983:898).

She had apparently left the cover of her litter closed when she wandered off and so nobody noticed that she was not inside when they departed. 'Ā'ishah nevertheless waited at the resting place hoping that someone would return to accompany her back to Madinah. However, it so happened that a young man by the name of Safwan ibn al-Mu'attal came by on his own way to Madinah. Noticing that she was stranded he offered her his camel and the young man led the camel back to Madinah. The innocent journey of the pair to Madinah proved to be one of the harshest trials of the young 'Ā'ishah's life. People accused her of being unfaithful to her beloved husband Muhammad (S.A.W.). Many others presumed that the beautiful daughter of Abu Bakr (R.A.) preferred the company of the handsome Safwan over the love and endearment of the ageing Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.) (*cf.* Siddiqui 1982:30).

The latter became suspicious of his young wife. In fact they both became so disillusioned and hurt by this incident that 'Ā'ishah became ill and decided to return to her parent's home to recover. To add to his despair, the Prophet (S.A.W.) had not received any revelation during this furor and it exacerbated the hurt and depression even more.

The Prophet's young wife realised that with everyone around her not believing her, only God could exonerate her in this instance. She had the greatest faith in the Almighty Allah and she expressed her innocence to one and all. Unfortunately, few people sincerely believed her. Eventually, while the Prophet Muhammad was at Abu Bakr's home one day, he received revelation and there appeared a special joy on his face. He wiped his forehead and proclaimed to this young wife: "Rejoice, 'Ā'ishah, Allah has revealed your innocence" (Fernea, 1977:31). 'Ā'ishah immediately began to praise none other than the Almighty God who had delivered to her her complete honour and innocence.

In fact the revelation which Muhammad (S.A.W.) received at the time of 'Ā'ishah's crisis is established as a religious law and is forever included in the Shari'ah as part of the penal code of Islam. The verse is as follows:

"And those who launch a charge  
against chaste women,  
And produce not four witnesses  
(To support their allegations), —  
Flog them with eighty stripes;  
And reject their evidence  
Ever after: for such men  
Are wicked transgressors; — " [S24:4]

Consequently this incident not only prescribed eighty lashes to people who falsely accuse anyone of adultery but it also secured the law of one hundred lashes to one who has been proven to participate in acts of adultery. 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) was forever after proud of the fact that she was vindicated by Allah the Most High and that there could be no more honourable proof of her innocence.

Another incident in the life of 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) also ensured that Allah reveal a verse to the Prophet (S.A.W.) regarding personal affairs. The verse in question reads:

"O ye who believe!  
 When you prepare for prayer, wash ...  
 But if you are ill,  
 Or on a journey,  
 .....  
 And ye find no water,  
 Then take for yourselves  
 Clean sand or earth,  
 And rub there with,  
 Your faces and hands,  
 God doth not wish  
 To place you in difficulty,  
 But to make you clean,  
 And to complete His favour to you,  
 That ye may be grateful." [S5:6]

This verse of Surah Mā'idah in the Holy Qur'ān was revealed after 'Ā'ishah had dispatched couriers to find a piece of jewellery which had been left behind on a journey and the time for prayers had arrived. Being without water the pious believers were concerned that the ritual prayer may have to be foregone. However, Allah revealed the verse on "*Tayammum*" (ablution at the time of nonavailability of water) where clean sand or earth can be used to make ablution and complete the prayers.

As the verse above mentions, it was revealed in order to remove any difficulties from the duties of the believers. It is no wonder then that it has been related by Dhakwān, the doorman of 'Ā'ishah that when she was in her last illness 'Abdullah ibn Abbas came to visit her and this is what he said: "... You were the most beloved of the wives of the Messenger of Allah to the Messenger of Allah, and the Messenger of Allah only loved the good. You dropped your necklace on the night of Al-Abwa' and the messenger of Allah began to look for it until morning found him still at the campsite. The people had no water and so Allah

revealed that they should do *tayammum* with good soil. What Allah allowed this community of lenience was through you ..." (Ibn Sa'd 1995:53). Sayyid bin Hundair (May Allah be pleased with him) said about the revelation of the verse on *Tayammum*, "O progeny of Abu Bakr! You are a source of blessings for the people" (Siddiqui 1982:29).

The following verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.) at a time of severe distress and pain and although they refer to all the unions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) they have particular significance to 'Ā'ishah as she was the one who was first approached by Muhammad after the verses were revealed. The Holy Qur'an mention in Surah Al-Ahzāb verses 28–29:

"O Prophet! Say to thy consorts:  
 'If it be that ye desire  
 The life of this world, And its glitter, —  
 then come!  
 I will provide for your enjoyment  
 And set you free  
 in a handsome manner.

But if ye seek God  
 And His Apostle, and  
 The home of the Hereafter,  
 Verily God had prepared  
 For the well-doers amongst you  
 a great reward'." [S33:28–29]

These verses touch on a most pertinent subject dealing with the lives of the wives of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). The position of the Consorts of Purity (*azwāj mutahharāt*) was unlike the lives of any ordinary believing woman. On the contrary the wives of the Prophet had special duties and responsibilities. Their first and most important function was to be a pillar of strength and reassurance

to their husband, the Prophet (S.A.W.) during his mission and Messengership.

It is not by mere status that they (the wives) were called *Umma hātul-Mu'minīn* – the 'Mothers of the believers', or *Azwāj Mutahharāt* – the 'Consorts of Purity'. Indeed they provided charity to the needy and Zaynab bint Khuzayma was especially devoted to the poor and needy. She was known as *Umm-ul-Masākīn* (the mother of the poor). Many of the other wives of Muhammad (S.A.W.) also displayed special care and concern towards the needy and destitute. All the Consorts of Purity had an obligation to participate and assist as Mothers of the believers. Theirs were not to be idle lives.

As they are addressed in the above verse of the Holy Qur'ān, they were not worthy of the sacred household of Muhammad (S.A.W.) if they longed for a life of ease and glamour. But if that is what they aspired to then they could have been duly provided for. However, if they chose the way of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the way of Islam, their rewards in the Hereafter would be 'greater'.

These verses were revealed at a time when the Prophet (S.A.W.) had separated from his wives for approximately a month because he was distressed that they had asked him for material requirements which his meagre, ascetic life did not allow him to own. After this revelation, he approached 'Ā'ishah first and proclaimed to her what Allah had guided him to say. The pious, devoted young wife immediately chose a life with the Prophet (S.A.W.) and a life of service in return for a high position in paradise as opposed to a life of "freedom" and "glitter" as the verse proposes. Her unwavering support of her husband and her immeasurable faith in Allah, the Almighty, never failed her. Once she had made her decision the other wives followed suit and to this day, they remain truly the Consorts of Purity, the *azwāj Mutahharāt*.

Besides her unmatched character and her playful demeanor, 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) is respected for her diligence and intelligence. Even the most knowledgeable scholars of Islam have turned to her for opinions on legal and social matters, simply because she was so observant and meticulous in her records of the lifestyle of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.). Being his beloved wife and companion, the person whom God chose to be present when the messenger received revelation, 'Ā'ishah inevitably became a great source of knowledge and enlightenment to the followers of the religion of Islam. She was regarded as an expert on Islamic Jurisprudence and has reported no less than 2 210 authentic *aḥadīth*. In a list of Muslim women and their contribution to education, 'Ā'ishah bint Abu Bakr surely takes the prime first place. She provided immense guidance to the first Muslim community and remained a shining light of knowledge and know-how even after the death of the Prophet (S.A.W.) (*cf.* Doi 1988:21–24).

Her reputation as a scholar spread quickly and people from far and wide came to sit in her company and learn all there was about Islam and its great Prophet (S.A.W.). 'Ā'ishah even guided the great *sahābah* (companions of the Prophet) who sought her advice on a variety of matters. These include the Khalif 'Umar (R.A.), Abdullah ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayrah (Doi, 1989:140). 'Ā'ishah had a very sharp memory and moreover she was an eloquent reciter. She remains amongst the great *huffaz* (memorizers) of *aḥadīth* (Doi 1989:140).

'Ā'ishah remained the undisputed spokesperson who approached the Prophet (S.A.W.) on behalf of the co-wives. She remained close to Hafsa bint 'Umar as both were daughters of the two closest companions of Muhammad (S.A.W.). She was popular with the elderly Sawdah, who forfeited her chance to be with the Prophet (S.A.W.) in favour of 'Ā'ishah, whom she (Sawdah) recognized as the best beloved of the Prophet (S.A.W.).

The Prophet (S.A.W.) himself was proud to have the intelligent and bubbly 'Ā'ishah as his partner. He was particularly aware of the fact that he received revelation of the Holy Qur'ān whilst he was in 'Ā'ishah's house. Moreover he spent his last days in her house and eventually left this world in her arms. 'Ā'ishah herself never ignored the opportunity to feel proud of this fact. Furthermore, even his grave became part of her home and she only veiled herself here after 'Umar Farouk (the second Khalif of Islam) was buried here. The previous two graves were of Muhammad (S.A.W.), her husband and Abu Bakr Siddique, her father, so that she did not require to veil herself.

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) participated in many battles for the cause of Islam. She together with other brave Muslim women, helped to feed and care for the men in the armies of Islam and she proved that *jihād* (the strife for the good of Din—al—Islam) was not denied to women (*cf.* Nadwi 1990:7).

The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) died in June 632 A.D. and he left the widow 'Ā'ishah just eighteen years old. Yet her maturity, intelligence and general disposition was way beyond her tender age. She, in fact, proved to be active in all spheres of Islamic life. Being at the forefront of the social, educational, cultural and political life of the time, she encountered an incident of tragic resolve in her life.

After the death of Hadrat 'Uthmān (R.A.) the third Khalif of Islam, 'Ā'ishah became adamant that his murder had to be avenged. What followed, became known as the Battle of the Camel in which the brave 'Ā'ishah led a force against the fourth Khalif 'Ali, who was also by this time her stepson—in—law, having married Fatimah daughter of the Prophet (S.A.W.) by Khadījah, his first wife.



This ill-fated fold of events which saw for the first time one Muslim against another, was forever a thorn in the near perfect character of 'Ā'ishah. In fact it became the cause of her sincere repentance until the minute she left this world. 'Ā'ishah and her followers lost this battle and 'Ali (R.A.) with due respect and just regard for the status of 'Ā'ishah had an escort to return with her to Madinah. Just as a former Khalif 'Umar Farouk (R.A.) had held this wife of the Prophet (S.A.W.), 'Ā'ishah, in dignified honour, so did 'Ali and the rest of the Muslim brotherhood. More specifically, during the Khalifat of 'Umar, Muhammad's widows received the sum total of 10 000 dirhams each, excepting 'Ā'ishah who was given 12 000 dirhams, taking due consideration of the special place she occupied in the Prophet's household.

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) never had any children of her own. But she had a special affection for her nephew Abdullah. It is for this reason that she was sometimes called Umm Abdullah – Mother of Abdullah.

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) took ill in 58 A.H. After a brief illness she left this world on 17 Ramadān and was buried in Jannat-al-Baqi on the very night. She was sixty-seven years of age (Siddiqui, 1982:130).

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) was undoubtedly justified in proudly admitting to the ten things by which she could be recognized as the most beloved of the Prophet (S.A.W.). These were mentioned in the very beginning of this section on the life of 'Ā'ishah. Moreover she was loved for her generosity and consideration of the less fortunate. We read in *Hayatus Sahābah* (The lives of the Sahabah) (Khandalwi 1985:263): "Hadrat Umm Darrāh (R.A.) narrates, 'Hadrat 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) got one lakh from somewhere (i.e. one hundred thousand) and she distributed all, while she was observing fast that day. Her maid servant reminded her that she

should have bought meat for a dirham for breaking fast'. She replied: 'Had you reminded me, I would have done so.'" This shows her unselfish nature in the field of distribution of food or money to the needy. She was completely oblivious to her own sacrifice and hunger, rather providing for the destitute. 'Ā'ishah's remarkable character of perseverance and patience is clearly shown here.

To this day 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) remains a figure worthy of emulation to anyone, male or female. Her status and position is etched in the history of Islam as a woman of immense strength and straight forwardness, courage and character piety and perseverance, intelligence and eloquence. It is no wonder then, that Fida Hussain quotes (1983:124) "Of the entire inmates, 'Ā'ishah alone by force of character and keenness of wit won for herself a place in the political and religious history of Islam ... From the time of her emergence from childhood till her death at the age of sixty six she exhibited a degree of ability which should earn her a place beside Agrippa and Elizabeth of history."

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) more than anyone has left the most sensitive yet detailed account of the life of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). If commitment and dedication were the contribution of Khadijah (R.A.) to the religion of Islam, then eloquence of speech, intelligence and perseverance, were part of the contribution of 'Ā'ishah (R.A.). There is no doubt that the women who made the largest contribution to the *ḥadīth* literature of Islam were Muhammad's (S.A.W.) widows (Ahmed 1992:73).

## 4.2 WOMEN OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

### 4.2.1 Zainab al-Ghazzali

"The crucial matter for Muslims is that we are firm in following Allah's way, with full trust in the correctness of our steps and in the clarity of our vision. You are the best of people evolved for mankind ... [S3:110] as well as the signs of establishing complete submission to *there is no God but Allah and Muhammad in His Messenger*. All that matters to us is adding new bricks to our building. That we do not neglect or retreat from our belief: the belief of *Tawhīd*, of work and exposition. An exposition of truth, for all mankind" (Al-Ghazzali, 1994:3).

These dynamic words from the pen of a prolific writer and Islamist, Zainab al-Ghazzali al-Jubaili, clearly show the commitment and dedication of one of the champions of 'modern' Islam.

Zainab al-Ghazzali was born in Egypt in 1917. By the time she reached the age of twenty, she had already started her very own organization for women called the Muslim Women's Association. Her sense of responsibility and faith in Allah the Almighty became apparent very early in her life and this gave her the incentive to motivate and organize other Muslim women into accepting themselves as important members of the Ummah. As the quotation above emphasises, Zainab had sincere belief in the oneness of God and the Message of his Prophet (S.A.W.), namely *Tawhīd*.

In order to fully understand the struggle of this most remarkable woman of contemporary Islam, we must first have a brief background of the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (The Muslim Brotherhood Organization). It is in the role of

mentor and leader of this organization that Zainab al-Ghazzali is most widely known. This does not however remove from her character, the nature and dedication of a fighter in the cause of Islam and its people.

The Muslim Brotherhood was an organization founded by Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) in Egypt in the year 1928. History and politics of the area around which the Muslim Brotherhood operated, show that at first the organization was seen as a socio-religious movement, where al-Banna was a preacher of the moral code of Islam, rather than the political affairs of state. The members were made up of mostly lower-middle class people such as schoolteachers, clerks, technicians, artisans and shopkeepers (cf. Choueiri 1990:49). A large part of the membership included students of the various tertiary institutions in Egypt.

The Muslim Brotherhood Organization became very popular due to its methods of highlighting the inadequacies of the Egyptian government in the fields of social and economic systems. Soon the organization evolved into a political party with fiery attacks on the government by eloquent and dynamic leaders like Hassan al-Banna and others. The 'cures' suggested by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood amounted simply to a need for a resurgence of Islamic beliefs and practices which seemed to be lacking in the society of the time, and moreover which was an accepted ideology of the government in power.

Al-Banna was firm in his commitment to rid Egypt of the Western philosophy of decadence and disruption of Islamic ideology. He advocated Islam in its entirety, without apology or complacency (Al-Ghazzali 1994:XIV).

Hassen al-Banna built the *Ikhwān* institutions which included a mosque, offices as headquarters, Hira' Islamic Institute and Umahāt-al Mu'minin school for

Ladies. It is from these places of learning that the Organization spread its message which echoed from Cairo as the nucleus to places far away in the Muslim World. In a short span of time, the Muslim Brotherhood had so great a following that the governments of Egypt and Sudan in particular regarded the leadership as a political threat to their very existence. Many of the leaders were harassed and imprisoned. Hassan al-Banna himself became a martyr when he was assassinated on the 12 February 1949.

The experiences of Zainab al-Ghazzali have been tremendously affected by the events which dominated the Muslim Brotherhood Organization. These experiences are recounted by al-Ghazzali in an interview which was conducted by Valerie J. Hoffman on 17 June 1981 at her home in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis. It is here that al-Ghazzali sheds light on her personality and work and displays her continued commitment to the Islamic cause and ideal.

When she was eighteen years old, she began working with a famous Egyptian feminist Huda al-Sha'rawi. They organized a women's movement which called for the liberation of women. The Egyptian Feminist Union was founded by Huda al-Sha'rawi and her colleagues. The goals of this organization seemed quite noble and pertinent at the time (*cf.* Ahmed 1992:176), namely:

Firstly, to raise Egyptian women's 'intellectual and moral' level and enable them to obtain political, social and legal equality.

Secondly, to have specific goals in order to obtain access to education at all levels for women.

Thirdly, reforming marriage laws, especially those pertaining to polygamy and divorce.

The Egyptian Feminist Union made inroads into the legislative process by beginning to review some of the laws pertaining to women. More precisely, Parliament passed a law in 1923 which set the minimum age of marriage for girls at sixteen and boys at eighteen. No other real changes were affected by the organization and Sha'rawi and other leaders began concentrating greatly on making their organization conform to Western Feminists movements of the time. The members of the Egyptian Feminist Union also removed their veils in public. They regarded this as a symbolic act of emancipation.

Although it appeared to the women involved that they would now be accepted as part of the progressive feminist movements they in essence merely conformed to the ideas of Western women writers who saw the veil as an obstacle to the progress of Muslim women. There appeared a common European belief that "the veil stood in the way of their (Egyptian women's) advancement" (Ahmed 1992:176). It soon became clear that Huda al-Sha'rawi was intent on introducing into Egypt and the Muslim world a type of Western Feminism.

Although many women followed her ideology and sentiment there were many others who disagreed with her. The most notable amongst the latter being Zainab al-Ghazzali. She at first looked towards Sha'rawi for some sort of feminist leadership, but soon realized the implicit acceptance of Western over indigenous in the ideas of the Egyptian Feminist Union, and had the courage and the foresight to turn away from it. In fact al-Ghazzali says of these times in her life: "It was a mistake to join Huda al-Sha'rawi. Islam has provided everything for both men and women. It gave women everything – freedom, economic rights,

political rights, social rights, public and private rights. Islam gave women rights in the family granted by no other society. Women may talk of liberation in Christian society, Jewish society or pagan society, but in Islamic society it is a grave error to speak of the liberation of women. The Muslim woman must study Islam that has given her all her rights ..." (Fernea 1985:234-235).

Consequently, Zainab al-Ghazzali left the Egyptian Feminist Union and established the Muslim Women's Association. The goals of this organization was to empower the Muslim woman through knowledge of her religion so that she would be convinced that the Feminist Liberation movements of the Western ideology were "deviant innovations" that occurred to incite Muslim women against the true spirit of Islam. Zainab al-Ghazzali felt strongly that the mischief makers had taken advantage of the 'backwardness' of Muslims. She considered Muslims, especially Muslim women to have taken for granted the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.). These two primary sources of Islam, she regarded as the constitution and law of Islam. Al-Ghazzali was adamant that Muslims get rid of their feelings of inadequacy and lethargy and rise up as their religion commands them to do. Muslims should live Islam in reality so that they can realize a world of unselfishness, true belief, justice, dignity and contentment.

By this time (1939) the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* had gained support as a movement of the Muslim people in Egypt and much of the Middle East. In fact, the organization, with Hasan al-Banna as its leader had progressed to the point where hospitals and dispensaries were established, schools and literacy programs instituted, youth camps and outings arranged. Changes in the society became apparent, especially with regards adherence to the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* of the Prophet (S.A.W.).

Female participation was not ignored in this massive movement. On the contrary, al-Banna founded a female section called *al-Akhawāt al-Muslimāt*. A 'Girls House' for Islamic Education was established where comprehensive Islamic educational programmes were held. This section was called *Dar-al-Tarbiyyah al-Islamiyyah li'l fatat*. It was merely a matter of time before the leadership of the *Ikhwān* met and merged with the Muslim Women's Association. Zainab al-Ghazzali was forever proud to be associated with al-Banna whom she referred to as 'Imam' (the leader of the community) and as 'Shahid' (one martyred for the sake of the religion of Islam). Both these titles exude a sense of honour and emulation and show how much in awe of this respected man, Zainab herself stood. Amongst all the similarities of the two organizations, i.e. the Ikhwan and the Muslim Women's Association – the medical facilities, educational programs, charitable assistance, etc. one is perhaps the most overpowering. More specifically, both the organizations had a political agenda which evolved as part of the growth process due to the public support received. The *Ikhwān* with al-Banna as head, as well as the Muslim Women's Association with Zainab al-Ghazzali as mentor aspired to obtain the rule of a true Islamic State. One that would be ruled by the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (cf. Fernea 1985:235). Moreover, both realized that what was most needed to fulfill this goal was a resurgence of true Islamic thought and action, a 'renaissance' of Islamic values and lifestyles.

What followed was a merger between the two organizations with the Muslim Women's Association at the same time maintaining a certain amount of autonomy. Perhaps one of the darkest stages of al-Ghazzali's life were during the days of the assassination of Hassan al-Banna.

The meetings between these two leaders had to be extremely discreet and confidential. The reason obviously being that by this time al-Ikhwan had



become the government enemy of the highest degree simply by its message and its immense public support. It was during this time that the authorities cracked down heavily on the *Ikhwān* and the organization had to be 'disbanded'. However, work underground continued unabated. As is common with all liberation movements, the members, especially the leadership, became even more inspired and militant. One of the most sincere and devoted supporters of the cause of the Muslim Brethren was of course, Zainab al-Ghazzali al-Jubaili.

Many members were imprisoned and tortured. Many others died for their cause. Soon Zainab began to emulate Hassen al-Banna. This progressed to the point where she realized that the Muslim Women's Association could not maintain its autonomy, it was imperative that it has a complete merger with the *Ikhwān*. She approached al-Banna, arranged for the two organizations to merge and pledged her complete allegiance to Hassen al-Banna (*cf.* Ahmed 1992).

By doing this Zainab al-Ghazzali had undertaken to form part of the leadership of the *Ikhwān*. She assumed the position of contact between the 'underground' *Ikhwān* movement and the imprisoned leadership. This put her in a very dangerous but nevertheless honoured position. She had displayed qualities of sincerity and devotion. By this stage, it was not only the female members of the struggle (*Ikhwān*) that praised and honoured her views and decisions but the males did as well (*cf.* Fernea 1985:235-236).

The assassination of Hassen al-Banna fueled in al-Ghazzali the anger of a devoted follower. The Egyptian government once again displayed its fear of overpowerment and dissolved the Muslim Women's Association, which by now had assumed a political stance which appeared militant and determined. Of course its leadership was in the hands of the woman who bravely founded it –

Zainab al-Ghazzali. This setback did not dampen her spirit and determination. She opposed the order of dissolution in court. She attributes her success in this legal battle to the help of the Almighty Allah (*cf.* Fernea 1985:236). The *Ikhwān* continued its activities under the guise of the Muslim Women's Association.

It is only after the death of Hassen al-Banna that Zainab al-Ghazzali together with a well known stalwart of the *Ikhwān*, Sayyid Qutb, began to play a key role in the history of the organization. If anything, the open attacks on Government policy, especially on the imperialism of the British in Egypt became the main focus of the Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb and the *Ikhwān* leader Hassen al-Hudaibi became fierce enemies of the state. By this time Jamal-Abd al-Nasir became head of Egypt. Once again the *Ikhwān* and its activities were forcibly suspended due to immense pressure on the government and much dissatisfaction against British colonial rule. Eventually the *Ikhwān* leadership were imprisoned and after a mock trial, they were sentenced to death. When al-Hudaibi was pardoned due to ill health and an infirm wanner due to old age, he was unable to fulfill the many varied and demanding duties as leader. It was then that Zainab al-Ghazzali together with Sayyid Qutb and 'Abd al-Fattah Isma'il assumed leadership of the *Ikhwān* (*cf.* Ahmed 1992).

Zainab was a much loved and admired figure of Egyptian society. She was of a humble disposition and became mentor and mother to the many members of the Muslim Brotherhood. However it was only a matter of time before Nasir realized that she in fact constituted a greater threat than perhaps any of the male leadership. She did what she could from outside whilst Qutb and others were imprisoned. There was despair and fear in the movement once Nasir layed charges against Zainab al-Ghazzali and she was imprisoned in 1965. The charge against her was an alleged conspiracy to kill Jamal-Abd al-Nasir and overthrow

his government. The terrible torment and torture which she suffered is the subject of Zainab al-Ghazzali's book "*Ayyām min hayāti*" (Days of my Life) which has recently been translated as *Return of the Pharaoh* by Mokrane Guezzou.

"Once the cell door was locked, I entered another world. Exhaustion, fatigue, starvation and pain had left deep marks on both my soul and my body. The physiological abuse I had suffered was becoming almost intolerable and unbearable as their physical perversions. Like a fire raging uncontrollably, my every move seemed to add fuel to the devastation already reaped by others. My only comfort was the adhān of Fajr, which I could hear coming from the outside" (Al-Ghazzali 1994:83).

This excerpt from her book is a frightening account of the torture suffered by Zainab al-Ghazzali in the Egyptian prisons. Yet her sincere devotion to God Almighty and her faith in the religion of Islam were her greatest companions in those dark and scary days. She suffered the most inhuman torture, humiliation and suffering yet she remained firm in her conviction that the truth of Islam would prevail. In her autobiographical account the words of the Qur'ān are often mentioned. This shows her knowledge of the book of Islam as well as her unwavering faith in assistance from her Creator. Every time she answered any of her interrogators with recitations from the Qur'ān she incited in them even more anger and frustration. She was well aware of this and yet continued in this manner as she felt that one of them too would turn to Islam in its proper sense. They (the interrogators) were also Muslim, yet she noticed in them the path of unbelief which often, she thought, was the outcome of indoctrination by Nasir and his government (*cf.* Al-Ghazzali 1994). Even during her time of anguish and torture, she still saw hope for many of her tormentors. What remarkable

qualities of perseverance and commitment.

The saddest days of her life in prison were when she heard about the execution of Sayyid Qutb, whom she referred to as a '*shahid*' (martyr) and others from the *Ikhwān*. Even her husband was 'killed' by Nasir and his men. He had been given an ultimatum whilst his wife Zainab was imprisoned, to either divorce her or face imprisonment himself. Eventually he was coerced into signing the divorce papers without any option and Zainab clearly believed that it culminated in his death. All these incidents exacerbated her terror and torment, anger and anxiety in prison. Yet this brave woman of courage and conviction did not succumb to Nasir's forces of power. Instead of dampening her enthusiasm for Islam and the Islamic movement, her experiences in prison increased Zainab's commitment and dedication for the cause of Islam. *Return of the Pharaoh* not only succeeds in bringing to life the notoriety of Egyptian prisons but it also reflects on the life of a most remarkable, brave and dedicated woman, who proudly carries the flag of Islam to this day (*cf.* Al-Ghazzali 1994).

Zainab al-Ghazzali had definite ideas about women, marriage and family life. This is what she said in the interview conducted in 1981 (Fernea 1985:236-237):

"The Brotherhood considers women a fundamental part of the Islamic call. They are the ones who are most active because men have to work. They are the ones who build the kind of men that we need to fill the ranks of the Islamic call. So women must be well educated, cultured, knowing the precepts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, knowing world politics, why we are backward, why we don't have technology. The Muslim woman must study all these things and then raise her son in the conviction that he must possess the scientific tools of the age, and at the same time he must understand Islam, politics, geography and current events.

He must rebuild the Islamic nation. We Muslims only carry arms in order to spread peace. We want to purify the world of unbelief, atheism, oppression and persecution ... Islam does not forbid women to actively participate in public life. It does not prevent her from working, entering into politics and expressing her opinion, or from being anything, as long as that does not interfere with her first duty as a mother, the one who first trains her children in the Islamic call. So her first, holy and most important mission is to be a mother and wife. She cannot ignore this priority. If she then finds she has free time, she may participate in public activities. Islam does not forbid her."

To the question about whether there is a place for a single woman in Muslim society, Zainab al-Ghazzali had this to say: (Fernea 1985:237) "Marriage is a sure Sunnah in Islam. There is no monasticism in Islam. Men must marry unless they have an excuse, that is, an illness". She says further: "Women are also excused if they have an illness. But marriage was instituted to reproduce children and establish the family, which is the fundamental unit in building the Islamic State. Marriage is a mission and a trust in Islam. Sexual life in Islam is a necessity for both men and women, but it is not the first and last goal of marriage. It is to preserve the human race, establish the family, build the man and the woman, to build the ruler, to bring about righteous government ... Any sexual relations outside marriage are totally prohibited. When a man has relations with his wife, it is Sunnah that they both wash themselves. And it is Sunnah that before he approaches her he says: 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. God protect us from Satan.' He begins in this way, because it is a human duty, a duty imposed by God, a divine duty."

These quotations give a very clear and concise explanation of how Zainab saw the position of women in society and also her views on the sanctity of marriage.

Due to the fact that she herself was married twice, the first union ending in divorce, Zainab al-Ghazzali is often criticized for her direct stance on this subject.

There is a line of thought on the contradictions of Zainab's lifestyle which are spelt out by Leila Ahmed in her book "*Women and Gender in Islam*". "The contradiction in al-Ghazzali's position on women is not confined to words. al-Ghazzali's own life seems, on the one hand, to flagrantly underent her statements on the role of women in Islamic society, and on the other hand, to demonstrate that all rights are available to the woman who knows her Islam even within the area legally of greatest peril for women, the laws governing marriage. Thus al-Ghazzali entered into two marriages, on terms that she set and that gave her control over the continuance of the marriages. She divorced her first husband because her marriage 'took up all my time and kept me from my mission' (as Islamic activist, not as wife and mother) and because her husband 'did not agree with my work'. She had stipulated before marrying him that her mission came first and that they would separate if there was any major disagreement between them" (Ahmed 1992:199).

The criticisms leveled against al-Ghazzali, by Leila Ahmed, regarding her marital experiences illustrates that she was correct in that women do have the right to stipulate conditions that are legally binding in a marriage contract. These remarks also indicate that it is permissible for women to place their work before their obligations to raise a family and to devote themselves to their husband. The critics seem to find fault precisely with the fact that although she (al-Ghazzali) mentions that a woman's first and foremost priority was to be a wife and mother, she seems to have gone against this principle in her own life.

It is plausible to criticize Zainab al-Ghazzali on the inconsistencies between her beliefs and convictions and her actual lifestyle. However, it needs to be remembered that a 'contract' involves two or more parties. Therefore, al-Ghazzali's husband may himself have realized that their marital relationship was not conducive to his lifestyle and therefore decided to agree to dissolve the marriage. Whether al-Ghazzali's 'calling' in the path of Islam was her primary duty as a Muslim woman, or whether it was more important than her obligations as a wife and mother, remains to be sorted between herself and her Creator. It however remains a controversial aspect of her life as a traditionalist.

What is clear however is that her upbringing gave her positive indications on becoming a leader. Her father, from a young age, had inculcated in Zainab the ambition and expectation of being an Islamic leader. He mentioned this desire with the goal of her emulating the female leaders of the Prophet's time. She says of her father in the interview (Fernea 1985:237): "He was Sheikh al-Ghazzali al-Jabili, a scholar who completed his education at al-Azhar. He refused to accept a government job, but he was a big cotton merchant. When it was not the cotton season, he devoted his time to preaching Islam. He went around the country, exhorting the people, preaching in the mosques on Fridays, teaching the Islamic call and religion. He always used to say to me that God willing, I would be an Islamic leader."

Whether Zainab al-Ghazzali's mission was an account of a religious revolutionary, as was the case with other members of the *Ikhwān*, or whether she was a leader of the spirituality and devotion which is inherent in the religion of Islam does not matter. The fact remains that she was a follower of the truth and a leader of the youth, both at the same time. Her contribution to Muslim society is not to be found only in her defiance and call for an Islamic state, but rather in

her courage, determination and commitment to her ideology and her religion.

Leila Ahmed (1992:201) mentions allegations of incongruencies in al-Ghazzali's life and mission. She finds it strange that the Islamic notion of being a path to spirituality and piety is not present in Zainab's call for Muslims to remove themselves from unjust and unethical rulers, to be defiant to those who do not follow the tenets of their faith in Islam. The writer rather, sees the *Ikhwān's* call for empowerment, glory and a pure and properly regulated society far removed from the principles of Islam. Ahmed (1992) questions whether the Islamic ideology was used merely because it was there.

However, al-Ghazzali's account of her life in prison under Nasser (al-Ghazzali 1994) clearly show instances where her spirituality and piety were a shining example of tolerance and determination. In fact it is quite clear in the book that her knowledge of Islam and her commitment to it as her force of defiance surely helped her through the terrible torture of the Egyptian prisons.

The fact that Zainab al-Ghazzali fought against the forces of imperialism and colonialism is not at all surprising. The effects of colonial rule has had both negative and positive effects on many of the world's most important nations. As far as Islam is concerned, colonialism has left its mark most remarkably on family life and society. The tendency to think that what the colonialists do, the way they live and how they act is the correct way – and that the Muslim way is not exactly right, has had the most adverse effect on Muslim societies. What the ideology of the *Ikhwān* presented to Egypt was a reversal of this perceived fact. They wanted back their own culture and way of life which was severely undermined in the name of modernity and secularization (*cf.* Ahmed 1992).



Although power and glory were the overwhelming themes of *Ikhwān* ideology, what Zainab al-Ghazzali tried to inculcate in the youth was that Islam was not in any way the 'wrong' way of life. In fact it was a path towards achieving both the truth on earth as the manifestation of a Muslim state would be in Egypt, as well as a path towards increased spirituality and oneness with God.

#### 4.2.2 Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi was born in the Moroccan city of Fez in 1940. Her birthplace was not far from the Karawiyeen University, which is known to be a medieval centre of learning. She was educated in local schools which were secluded and especially catered for traditional women of the city. She went on to graduate from Mohamed V University as a student of political science. Her studies continued and she graduated further with a degree in Sociology. The main focus of Mernissi's work is the socio-political issues regarding women in society. She is at present teaching at the Mohamed V University in Morocco (*cf.* Mernissi 1991).

Fatima Mernissi has written many books with Islam and women as her speciality. Her publication *The Harem Within* is an autobiography. This was followed by many others such as *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*; *Beyond the veil: male-female dynamics in Muslim Society*; *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam* and *Women and Islam*. Her books have been translated into English and are widely accessible especially in the United States of America.

The onslaught of the feminist movement has not ignored the religion of Islam and it especially finds the position of women in Muslim lands tremendously oppressive. Fatima Mernissi is the flag-bearer of Western feminist ideology in

Islam. Most of her books are an attempt to reinforce the ideas of inequality and unjustness against Muslim women and she uses the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* to unscrupulously expound her arguments. However, Fatima Mernissi has taken the stance of many Biblical feminists in her ideas.

In Chapter 1 of her book *Beyond the Veil* (1985:31) dealing with the Muslim concept of active female sexuality she asks: "Why does Islam fear *fitna* (sedition)? Why does Islam fear the power of female attraction over men? Does Islam assume that the male cannot cope sexually with the uncontrolled female? Does Islam assume that women's sexual capacity is greater than men's?" This similarity between Mernissi and other biblical feminist writers show how she has been influenced by Western thinkers and in this way has been inspired by the feminists interpretations of the Bible. In this way she encourages a reinterpretation of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth*. These two most authentic sources of Islam and Islamic Law, are in no way requiring a female or male reinterpretation per se. What they do require, though, are respect and obedience, because the Qur'ān is the word of God, which is eternal and everlasting. It would hold true today as it did in the seventh century when it was revealed.

In the same vein, Mernissi ignores the fact that polygamy, which is the cornerstone of the Muslim feminist debate, was an institution which existed long before the advent of Islam. The Qur'ān in fact restricted the unlimited form of polygamy which was the norm of pagan Arabs. Instead, she views the Muslims who were historically defeated and their countries occupied by the West, as "finding themselves defending anachronistic institutions like polygamy" (Mernissi 1985:7). Mernissi's greatest flaw is her confusion about whether Islam as a religion embodies inequalities between males and females and also whether laws and customs ensure this inequality. On the one hand she condemns the senseless

comparisons and unfounded arguments made by some Western scholars about Muslim women and yet at the same time she too blames the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth*, for viewing women in Islam as oppressed. In *Beyond the Veil* (1985:9) Fatima Mernissi says: "Muslim society would have to grant women, now needed as workers or soldiers, all the other rights which have until now been male privileges. It would have to bring about a drastic desegregation of all spheres of social life and dismantle traditional roles which embody the inequality between the sexes". The irony in this excerpt is that Mernissi argues vehemently that Islam as personified by the Qur'ān imposes this inequality and at the same time she asserts that laws and customs are to blame for injustices against women.

To clarify the point, it is true that laws and customs, traditions and rituals have denied the Muslim woman her God given rights and privileges, even her obligations and responsibilities are being violated. Yet it is not Islam as a religion which was revealed in the Qur'ān and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) through his way of life, that envisages any notion of inequality or injustice against women. What then is the point of ferociously attacking these two authentic sources of Islam? Is it not rather a question of educating society about the principles embodied in these sources, so that Muslims can learn and practice the serene, just and dignified lifestyle which Islam as a way of life has intended for every Muslim, male and female?

Fātima Mernissi makes a point of stating that she is not comparing the conditions of Jewish and Christian women in the West with Muslim women in the East (Mernissi 1985:32–33). Yet her entire argument is along the lines of feminists from precisely these Western domains. Furthermore, awareness and enlightenment should take the place of feminism in Muslim countries and amongst Muslim minorities. This educative process would ensure that Muslims

obey and adhere to the words of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* on issues regarding the position of women. In this way then, the process cannot be called feminism but more appropriately it should be a revival or a renaissance of Islamic ideology. The respectable and honoured positions of justice and equality for women are inherent in the Islamic Scriptures. They have not been practiced properly and history and custom have thus dispossessed the Muslim woman of the dignity and integrity she deserves according to the Qur'ān and *Hadīth*. However, the most unacceptable aspect of Mernissi's work is her utter disrespect for God. Not unlike her Christian counterparts, she calls Allah, the Almighty, "... the Muslim God" (Mernissi 1984:57).

In *Beyond the Veil* (1985) Mernissi refers to the social and religious ceremonies of Muslim marriages and she says: "... the sexual act is considered polluting and is surrounded by ceremonies and incantations whose goal is to create an emotional distance between the spouses and reduces their embrace to its most family function, that of a purely reproductive act" (1985:113). It is strange that a writer whose knowledge of Islam is supposed to be vast and deep fails to recognize the sanctity of the Muslim marriage in the way in which Islam has intended. The whole conjugal relationship, physical as well as emotional, should culminate in the spiritual enhancement of the couple because the marital relationship in Islam is regarded as a form of *'ibādah* (worship). Reproduction is therefore not the sole aim of the marital relationship as Fatima Mernissi implies.

There is a stark contrast between Mernissi's initial discussions and her later work, especially on issues regarding women as has been discussed above. In *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1992), the author attempts to journey back in time to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, the period of revelation, in order to justify a particular *hadīth* of the Prophet which seemingly implies that women cannot be worthy leaders (*cf.*

Shah 1993, Vol. 9:219).

The contrast is evident in Mernissi's words: "We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition" (Mernissi 1991:viii).

The need for ferocious protest against the injustice and inequalities against Muslim women which the author challenges is not justified then according to her words above. This is precisely the case because unlike the feminism characteristic of the West where basic human rights for females is the principle argument, Islam has given women these rights through divine revelation in the Qur'ān. There is no need to 'fight' for these – if only Muslims can set aside customs and rituals and obey the Qur'ān in the way in which it was intended.

Yet Mernissi finds it necessary to delve into the lives of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his wives and also into what she views as misogynistic *ḥadīths* which have been responsible for inequalities between the sexes in Islam. On these accounts, the author claims that sacred texts have been manipulated and that false *ḥadīths* have been invented in order to legitimize the subordination of women in Islam. Her overall solution, after much deliberation and debate, is none other than a reinterpretation of sacred texts (*cf.* Mernissi 1984, 1991, 1992).

The Qur'ān was revealed by God. Who in this world will take on the daunting task to even think themselves comparable to Divine inspiration and ability, so that they can "reinterpret" the Holy Book?

Fatima Mernissi also takes objection to the eminent *muhaddith* (collector of *ahadith*), al-Bukhari at the expense of 'Ā'ishāh (1992:75–77). Here Mernissi finds Bukhari unfairly implicating women in the *hadith*: "Three things bring bad luck: house, woman and horse". However she quickly describes how 'Ā'ishāh corrected Abu Hurairah, the narrator of the *hadith* which should read: "The Prophet said: 'May Allah refute the Jews; they say three things bring bad luck: house, woman and horse'" (Shah 1993, Vol. 7:29). Mernissi attributes this oversight to Bukhari, but on examining the said *hadith* it is evident that the entire *hadith* with 'Ā'ishāh's version is mentioned and only the latter part is mentioned in subsequent narrations. One therefore has to first read and understand the entire narration before merely taking the latter part out of context. This method of *hadith* collection is typical of Bukhari's method and it should be used in this manner.

We therefore see that in order to motivate a reinterpretation of authentic Islamic texts, Fatima Mernissi has merely succeeded in reinventing and reimagining exactly what she set out to reinterpret. Her reliance on Western feminist methodology does not apply to the Islamic model as has been mentioned before. Muslim women cannot begin to rise in their communities from a position of underdog and subservience. Their initial status needs to be the one which Islam has bestowed on them. Muslim women are spiritually, economically and socially equal human beings with men and complementary partners in the basic unit of society, the family.

To conclude then, Fatima Mernissi's contribution to Muslim society has been one of enlightenment as well as controversy. She has stirred a debate with her daring accusations and this has awakened a sense of research which is healthy in any academic debate.

### 4.2.3 **Maryam Jameelah**

The following brief autobiography is taken from a letter by Maryam Jameelah which was addressed to the writer of this dissertation. "I was born in New York on May 23, 1934, a fourth-generation American of German-Jewish origin. During my childhood and youth I attended the ordinary public schools in my locality which were thoroughly secular and American although on a much higher educational standard in those days (1939-1952) than the American public schools today. Then I attended New York University for two years (1953-1955) but was forced to discontinue my formal education due to illness without getting any degree or diploma. I spent two years in public and private mental institutions (1957-1959). In the spring of 1961 I formally embraced Islam in New York City. I lived alone in a women's hostel for one year (1961-1962). Began correspondence with Maulana Maudoodi (1960-1962) and at his invitation migrated to Lahore I was only three weeks in Maulana Maudoodi's home and family. and then went to his friends in a small town, Patteki for nearly a year. (1962-3) From April-August 1963 committed by the Maulana to another public mental insitution in Lahore. In August 1963 I married a wholetime worker of the JAMA 'AT-E-ISLAMI, Lahore who already had another wife and several children. Became mother of four children, two boys and two birls. Maryam Jameelah's sons migrated to the U.S.A. in 1987. Younger married daughter lives in Lahore and eldest married in Faisalabad. Many grandchildren. Besides wife and mother, free-lance writer and author on books in English about Islam, many articles, essays and reviews on books by other authors in English on Islam and the Muslim world. Author of the following books: ISLAM VERSUS THE WEST, ISLAM AND MODERNISM, ISLAM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, ISLAM AND ORIENTALISM, ISLAM VERSUS AHL AL KITAB PAST AND PRESENT, ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY, WESTERN CIVILIZATION

CONDEMNED BY ITSELF 2 Vols, and my only attempt at fiction—writing: my Palestinian novel: AHMAD KHALIL; THE STORY OF A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE AND HIS FAMILY. Now I spend most of my literary activity writing book reviews for the MUSLIM WORLD BOOK REVIEW quarterly, U.K. The theme of nearly all my writings whatever form they take, is the unhappy relationship between Islamic civilization and the West. My husband was the publisher of all my books. I stay at home most of the time and have done all my literary work at home. In recent years, the death of my mother from cancer in 1985 and my elderly father passed away of old age at age 101 years. In this May 1996. In April 1996 my co—wife who had long suffered from diabetes passed away leaving me as the only wife with nine step children in addition to my own children. I have few Pakistani friends: most of my friends are European and American converts to Islam like myself. Mostly I socialize within my husband's large extended joint family. Although I entered Islam in the atmosphere of political activist Islamic organizations, after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, my views on Islam changed radically. I spend a great deal of time alone in the house. The post keeps me in contact with the outside world ..." (Maryam Jameelah, 15 August 1996).

An overview of the thoughts and writings of Maryam Jameelah is described by the Ameer of Jama'at—e—Islami, Tufail Muhammad in his preface to her book *Islam and Modernism* (1968): "... she attempts to prove that Muslims have no alternative but to reject all un—Islamic modes of life such as modernism, and strive to practice the faith exactly as the Holy Prophet and his Companions understood it, interpret the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah in their strict literal sense, cease to submit Islam to foreign criteria and abandon every trace of apologetics — Islam needs no apology" (1968: Preface).



Maryam Jameelah's fervour and commitment to Islam is most remarkable especially because she has embraced Islam, it has not been her religion since birth. Moreover that her conversion to Islam was accomplished in one of the most powerful and capitalist countries in the West, the United States of America. More importantly though is her absolute disregard for materialism and secularism, which she strongly feels would be the downfall of the West. Maryam Jameelah believes that if Muslims follow this path of destruction and annihilation they would suffer the same fate as their non-Muslim counterparts. The titles of her books makes clear mention of her themes and convictions and she expresses her views with the utmost enthusiasm and confidence.

In her book *Islam and Modernism*, Maryam Jameelah refutes the claims of prominent Islamic modernists such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Asaf Fyzee, Taha Hussain, Kemal Ataturk and Ameer Ali. In doing so she concludes: "Let us (Muslims) have the moral courage to condemn modernist values as destructive to society and degrading to the individual personality. Islam is neither past, present nor future but timeless. Good and evil are not mere subjective, relative terms, limited to time, place and circumstances, but absolute, eternal and transcendental Truth. Let us, above all, appreciate Islam as an independent way of life with its own unique standards and values which never need be compared with any manmade philosophy for its justification" (1968:205).

The author's strong words and expressive debate with modernists in this work lend more credit to her commitment and faith in the religion of her choice and allows one to marvel at her dedication and fervour of strength in the faith of Islam.

In *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (1982), the author reveals the development of her ideas and thoughts from the period before her embracing Islam and her discussions with numerous Islamic scholars including Dr. Hamidullah of Paris, Dr. Said Ramadan of Geneva and of course Maulana Maudoodi of Pakistan. The latter influenced Maryam Jameelah tremendously and the similarity of their ideas and thoughts strengthened their relationship to the point where Maryam Jameelah (formerly Margaret Marcus) found it necessary to emigrate to Pakistan. Maulana Maudoodi wrote to her as follows: "... I am amazed how a girl born and brought up in America has been able to attain such an accurate insight into the problem (of modernism) ... You win my deepest admiration and I only pray to Allah that He may give you more and more wisdom and steadfastness to expound and promote the cause of Islam" (1982:50).

Maryam Jameelah undertook, on her own free will, to educate and enlighten Muslims, students and lay people about the Western onslaught against Islam and more specifically the disruption that secularism and modernism can cause. To this end, she set about researching and writing numerous books. In *Islam and Orientalism* she says: "After I embraced Islam I was dismayed to find certain scholars and political leaders within the Muslim community openly collaborating with the Christian and Jewish orientalists in repudiating the injunctions of the Holy Qur ān and *Hadīth* as obsolete and no longer relevant to the modern age. I knew that our so-called 'progressives' must be traitors because their views as expressed in their public utterances and writings did not at all differ from the non-Muslim 'specialists' on Islamic affairs and also because the former never fails to receive the most enthusiastic support from the latter. So dismayed was I by the anti-Islamic propaganda that had been fed to me since childhood that as soon as I embraced Islam, I was determined to compile a book exposing the full

ugliness of this malicious prejudice for what it is ..." (1981:xviii).

In this way Maryam Jameelah proceeds to break down the arguments and theories of orientalists like Phillip K. Hitti and others. She provides cogent arguments to counteract the expressions of these writers in order to prove her view that modernization as perceived especially by colonialism and imperialism has proven to be detrimental to the fabric of Muslim society and to Islam as a religion. An example of her arguments against Hitti is as follows (1971:1): "At the very outset, Dr. Hitti argues that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was an impostor. The narration of his life gives the reader the impression that he had carefully planned in his mind the entire scheme beforehand. In commenting on the events following the *Hijrah*, he writes: 'In Medina gradually the seer in him recedes to the background, and the politician, the practical man of affairs, emerges. A change in character of revelations is noted'."

Maryam Jameelah was angry and hurt by the fact that Hitti is careful to use the most cynical and sarcastic language in his work on *The History of the Arabs*. Furthermore, she notes that the above quotation utterly fails to appreciate the real significance of the *Hijrah*. "In Mecca the Holy Prophet was a preacher only but in Medina he organized the faithful into a strongly knit community, thus translating his preaching into practice" (1971:2).

In this way the author goes on to vigorously challenge many orientalist arguments and she concludes that: "... the theme of all their writings is that Islam must be abandoned on the premise that anything revealed fourteen centuries ago is necessarily obsolete and irrelevant for the technological civilization of today" (1971:120). "A true Muslim can never entertain such a negative and pessimistic view of life – Islam does not tolerate the separation of

religion from society ... If the present trends ruling the Muslim countries today are allowed to continue unchecked, the Muslims will soon face annihilation religiously, culturally and even physically. And that is precisely what the orientalist and their collaborators are feverishly striving for" (1971:128).

In the preface to her book *Islam and Western Society* (1982), Maryam Jameelah categorically spells out the motivation for her writing (1982:ix). "This collection of ten essays, written between October 1971 and August 1975, is intended for the English speaking, modern-educated Muslim in Muslim lands specifically and for the intelligentsia in Asia and Africa generally, in order to warn them of the fatal pitfalls of modernization; that to copy the West blindly and uncritically in everything does not provide any remedy for the social problems of the so-called 'poor', 'under-developed' countries of the East but rather will only aggravate the predicament in which they now find themselves in addition to creating numerous new troubles exported by the West under the banner of 'modernity'."

Her book begins with an essay on how the life of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) impacted on her personal life. This chapter has a very quiet and tranquil character as compared to some of her other work which exudes feelings of bitterness and a sense of obligation to correct the fallacies about Islam. There is thus evidence here of her respect and devotion to the religion of Islam. Maryam Jameelah sees in the Prophet of Islam that the purpose of life is achievement and not enjoyment. "In Islam achievement is rated on accomplishing what is enduring and worthwhile through useful, benevolent and productive work and to refrain from wasting one's time in empty self-gratification disgraced by sinful deeds. The supreme achievement is to attain, through implicit obedience to Qur'ān and Sunnah, eternal salvation in the world to come" (1982:7). In this way the life of Maryam Jameelah was

influenced to the extent that her life and work are dedicated to achieving the ultimate height of spirituality and she has dedicated it to gaining salvation in the Hereafter.

Of particular significance to this research is her expression of ideas on the chapter entitled "*The Feminist Movement and the Muslim Woman*" (1982:98–116). Maryam Jameelah is of the opinion that: "Feminism is an unnatural, artificial and abnormal product of contemporary social disintegration which in turn is the inevitable result of the rejection of all transcendental, absolute moral and spiritual values" (1982:105). "The most radical movement in recent times which is revolutionizing the whole social structure and changing the entire basis of human relationships is the Feminist movement ... The feminists wish to abolish the very characteristics which make man human and undermine the foundation of all his relationships and social ties. The result will be suicide, not only of a single nation as in the past, but of the entire human race" (1982:98).

The author's strong views and direct approach envelopes all her writings. They prove that she is bitter and angry at the false allegations against Islam. At the same time her anger is levelled at Muslims in order to motivate them into salvaging the situation by behaving according to the spirit of the Qur'ān and *hadīth*. Her outspoken attitude lends a remarkable contribution to Muslim society especially since she proves that women have equal rights with men in Islam to bring to light any injustices which affect them.

Although Maryam Jameelah uses confrontational terms and views, her dedication and commitment to the Islamic cause cannot be doubted, neither can it be ignored. Her photograph at the beginning of some of her books shows her covered in *hijāb* from top to toe. Her attitude and confidence proves that the Islamic

dress, which some Muslims and non-Muslims find to be extreme, cannot impede or hinder progress and mental development in a woman. In fact it is, in the case of Maryam Jameelah, a sign of her dignity and intelligence.

#### 4.2.4 B. 'Ā'isha Lemu

"In the course of my work as a teacher I found myself baffled by the way Islamic Studies was taught in Nigerian schools. It focused entirely on how to pray, how to fast, but nobody taught the students why they should pray, fast, etc. or even why they should believe in Islam. They were just taught from the traditional Arabic books, which even the teacher could barely understand."

"By 1976 we had moved to Minna in Niger State where I got the post as principal of the Women's Teacher's College and my husband was transferred to the judiciary first as Qādi and then as Grand Qādi of Niger State. I resigned in 1978 and spent a year working on a book called *Methodology of Primary Islamic Studies*."

This is an excerpt from a letter by 'Ā'isha Lemu which was addressed to the student of the present research (20 September 1996). The quotation shows her early commitment to the development of Islamic education. It has also culminated in her adding numerous other books in this field. Some of these are: *Junior Islamic Studies Series, Lessons from the Qur'ān, Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools, Animals in Islam* and many others. 'Ā'isha Lemu has written books on social issues in Islam as well, like "*The Ideal Muslim Husband*", "*The Ideal Muslim Wife*", and her paper on "*Women in Islam*" has also been published.

In the latter book, which is most pertinent to this dissertation, she says: "During the last fifteen years since I came to accept Islam, I have been asked many questions about the Muslim way of life by non-Muslim friends and acquaintances. The ignorance of the ordinary educated Westerner about Islam is almost total; but the area where a vacuum of knowledge has been most effectively filled with misinformation is possibly concerning the role of women in Islam" (1992:13).

Her acceptance of Islam is also part of her autobiographical letter: "My ambition to study Chinese was at last fulfilled but it coincided with a feeling that somehow I was never going to find the full truth in Chinese philosophy or Buddhism or Hinduism. I found myself without belief and not knowing where I was going. Like Dante whom I read in my Italian studies: 'I found myself in a dark wood, from which the way out was obscure'. Was there a God? Was there a true religion in the full sense of the word, of its reliability in all areas? I did not know and it was a disturbing situation."

"The way opened in late October or November 1961 through an Indian whom I sat next to on a London bus. He started talking about Islam, and as we were getting off at the same stop the discussion continued. He fetched two books on Islam from his house and asked me to meet him after a week to give him my views on the books."

"I knew very little about Islam and had never considered it as a possibility because of the negative image it had, 'something like Christianity, but worse'. To my surprise however, when I started on the books, I began to find them interesting. I was given others and through my Indian friend I began to meet other Muslims. Then I was given the Qur'ān with Yusuf Ali's translation. As

soon as I began to read it I sensed that this was the real thing. The clarity, the balance of this world and the Hereafter, the sheer sense of authority, were convincing evidence that the Qur'ān could not have been composed by Muhammad (S.A.W.) or by any human being. Before finishing even Surat al-Baqarah I decided to submit to Allah, and on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1961 I went to the Islamic Cultural Centre (now the Central Mosque) in London and took the *Kalimah*" (20 September 1996).

Once 'Ā'isha Lemu accepted the religion of Islam her activities and studies centred only around her new found belief and conviction. She achieved the highest positions in all the various movements and associations which she initiated in order to facilitate the needs of fellow Muslims at university and on a social level. Whilst completing her honours degree at the University of London in Modern Chinese she writes:

"At this time there were no facilities for *ṣalāh* at the University of London. I joined other students to form the Islamic Society of the College and was its first secretary. We were able to get a small room for prayer and arranged for '*iftaar*' (the breaking of the fast of Ramadhan) for the Muslim students. The following year I was also the founder member of FOSIS (Federation of Students Islamic Societies in the U.K. and Eire)."

During the course of her studies in London 'Ā'isha met her future husband Sheik Ahmed Lemu from Nigeria, who was a student of History of the Near and Middle East at the University of London. When she completed her post graduate degree in Education, 'Ā'isha decided to go to Nigeria as a teacher. She was also keen to meet and adjust to Nigerian society as she had by then decided to marry Sheik Ahmed. This was a tremendous adjustment as she was to become part of a



polygamous relationship. Sheik Ahmed was married to a Nigerian woman and had several children already by this time. They married in April 1968 and had two children, a son and a daughter.

Once in Nigeria 'Ā'isha progressed in the field of teaching, from an English teacher at the School for Arabic Studies in Kano, Nigeria to becoming Principal of the Girls College in Sokoto. It was in these circumstances that she began to develop her skills in writing numerous text books for students in Islamic Studies. Her commitment and dedication to both teaching as a career as well as to her Islamic convictions ensured that she endeavoured to perfect the imparting of knowledge about the religion of Islam. It is in this way that 'Ā'isha Lemu has contributed to the development of Islamic education. She has emerged as one of the foremost Muslim educationists and her work is valuable in imparting the Islamic value system and moral code.

To this end she and her husband established the Islamic Education Trust. This is what she has to say about this organization: "In the interim, Sheik myself and another colleague established an organization called the Islamic Education Trust. Its first aim was to employ and provide free Islamic Studies teachers to missionary schools where Muslim children were being converted to Christianity simply because there was no-one to teach them Islam. I am at present Director General of the Islamic Education Trust. We have a bookshop, publications division, primary school, secondary school, women's (adult education) school and branches in seven states" (letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 1996).

The position and status of Muslim women also became a focus of 'Ā'isha's work in Nigeria. "In 1985, after discussions with interested Muslim Women, a meeting was held to form a Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria

(FOMWAN). I was elected its first national *Amīrah* (leader) for a four year term of office. The organization now has branches in most of the Nigerian States and in the local Government areas. It is accepted as the voice of Muslim women in Nigeria. I am at present Chairman of FOMWAN Board for International Relations" (20th September 1996).

‘Ā’isha Lemu’s curriculum vitae reads like a list of achievements which are filled with commitment and hard work. Her most remarkable accomplishments are in the fields of the development of education. As such she has attained great recognition and praise for these efforts. She is also honoured with the highest posts in the educational arena of the Nigerian government. She has travelled extensively and she continues to work on improving the process of Islamic Education in North African schools. This is how she sees her achievements:

"I was also a member of the Islamic Studies Panel set up by the Nigerian Educational Research Council about twelve years ago to revise the Islamic Studies National Curriculum at Primary, Junior secondary and Senior secondary levels. Over the years I have also visited a number of countries to attend seminars, workshops, give lectures, etc. These include, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Trinidad, Barbados, South Africa, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore and many others. I also attended the Beijing Conference on women this year on behalf of FOMWAN. We conducted a workshop there at the N.G.O. Conference. I am currently working with my husband on a series of books on Islamic Studies for Nigerian Primary Schools. My husband has since retired as Grand Qādi and is the National President of the Islamic Education Trust. I owe him a tremendous debt of knowledge in all my writings" (20th September 1996).

The manner and dedication of 'Ā'isha Lemu's life to the development of Islamic education is remarkable. She detected a gap in the education system and immediately put her teaching skills and knowledge into useful practice. The fact that her curriculum vitae is full of her achievements and endeavours shows her commitment to the excellence and perfection of Islamic Studies for the Muslim youth. 'Ā'isha Lemu is also recognized as an authority on Islamic curricula for Muslim schools both in Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

It is imperative to note that her emphasis on Islamic education as a way of life rather than mere knowledge of rituals and conditions, have a remarkable effect on the very thought processes of Muslim youth. She encouraged students to ask why they have to perform *ṣalāh* (prayer) or practice *ṣaum* (fasting) rather than merely learning how to do these rituals. In this way, Muslim youth can grow up knowing exactly how and why Islam should be their guide towards salvation in the Hereafter.

As far as Muslim women and dress is concerned, 'Ā'isha Lemu says: "A Muslim woman may wear whatever she pleases in the presence of her husband and family or among women friends. But when she goes out or when men other than her husband or close family are present she is expected to wear a dress which will cover all parts of her body and which should not reveal her figure. What a contrast with Western fashions which every year concentrate quite intentionally on exposing yet another erogenous zone to the public gaze! The intention of Western dress is to reveal the figure, while the intention of Islamic dress is to conceal it, at least in public" (1992:25).

"The onus of modest behaviour however falls not only on women. The injunctions of the Qur'ān are directed to men and women alike. God says: 'Tell

believers to avert their glances and to guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Tell believing women to avert their glances and guard their private parts and not to display their charms except what (normally) appears of them. They should draw their coverings over their bosoms and not show their charms except to their husbands ...' [S24:30–31]" (Lemu 1992:26).

"It would appear that the Islamic system has achieved the right mixture of freedom and security that women seek and that is in the interests of the society as a whole. Relevant quotations from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are obviously the most authentic sources. If at different times and in different places these principles (of Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*) have been distorted, ignored or flouted, it is not the principles and laws which are at fault, but man's selfishness which sometimes leads them to distort, ignore and flout what they do not like, and turn aside from the truth."



"Fortunately, no one has changed or can change the words of the Qur'ān, and the regulations for the protection of women which were revealed in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century can be easily verified by anyone in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I believe that these laws and social regulations regarding women contain certain fundamental truths which will benefit whoever applies them. The present time of rethinking of the role and rights of women is perhaps the appropriate time to look with fresh eyes at the Islamic point of view, which has contributed to the formation of stable societies in both sophisticated and underdeveloped peoples in vast areas of the world over the past fourteen centuries, which has retained the continuity of its principles, and from which the Western world may have something to learn" (1992:30).

‘Ā’isha Lemu’s bold attitude and feelings about the role of women in Islam is strongly linked to her desire to educate Muslims about Islam. Her contribution

to society as a Muslim woman is her untiring ambition and dedication to Islamic education. The fact that she has taken the lead in so many organizations and committees proves that women can use the achievements in their lives in order to affect a change in society as a whole. As an educationist and firm proponent of Islamic ideology, her work is extremely important to the present and future generations of Muslims the world over.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* have secured the independence and responsibility of Muslim women in society. Azizah al-Hibri quotes the second caliph of Islam, Umar Ibn al-Khattab as saying, "By God, we did not use to pay attention to women until God said about them in the Qur'ān what is said, and gave them their share in matters" (1982:213).

Maryam, mother of 'Isā (Jesus) is personally addressed in the Qur'ān (S19:22-25). She was thus acknowledged as an important individual, who had the honour of experiencing the divine birth of the Prophet 'Isā (A.S.).

Khadijah (R.A.) had pagan roots and yet had the distinction of becoming the first Muslim of the Ummah of the Prophet of Islam.

'Ā'ishah (R.A.) was the source of two important revelations of the Qur'ān [(S:24:4), (S5:6)]. Both verses have significant consequences on the personal lives of Muslims. Furthermore 'Ā'ishah (R.A.) became the epitome of an active, independent and responsible Muslim woman. She is thus a prime example of the contribution of early Muslim women to Islam and to society at large.

Furthermore, 'Ā'ishah and Maryam were both women who experienced the embarrassment of being unfairly accused of promiscuity. Moreover, they stood firm in their innocence and they were exonerated by God.

Socio-political developments in the Middle East have heightened interest in Islam. Muslim women have been the subject of particular attention in this regard. The substantial return of Muslim women to the veil and to religious lifestyles is not representative of their oppression. It is an expression of their enlightenment towards the elevation of their status in Muslim society (*cf.* Ahmed 1992; Al-Hibri 1982).

The women of contemporary Islam who have been selected in this dissertation are representative of the resurgence of Islamic ideology. Zainab al-Ghazzali and B. 'Ā'isha Lemu have appealed to the youth to realize Muslim lifestyles. The youth are the leaders of tomorrow and their attitudes have a great impact on future Islamic societies.

Fatima Mernissi has been at the forefront of feminism within the Islamic context. Maryam Jameelah, on the other hand, has vociferously criticized feminist views on Islam. The differences in the writings of these two Muslim women requires an in depth debate on the position of women in Islam. this exercise would clarify major issues such as polygamy, divorce and inheritance which affect the daily lives of Muslim women.

It would also stimulate effective research on the topic, thereby making it clear to Muslims that the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* have elevated the status of women in society. There should be no apologetic views about Islam in this regard. The ideology of Islam should be the pre-condition for any such research and in this

way encourage a dynamic and valuable community of Muslims. The first and foremost expression in this regard is that Muslim women need to assume their rightful status in society according to the position given to them by the primary sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*.

It is clear that the women selected in this dissertation, in order to highlight the contribution of women to Muslim society, all come from varied backgrounds and lifestyles. However, the essence of their lives and their work show that they have contributed both in character and action towards the development of Muslim society. This enhances the need for women from all walks of life to effectively participate in realizing a harmonious, dynamic and fruitful Muslim society which functions within the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.).



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to highlight two important issues in Islam. Firstly, that the Qur'ān has granted equal rights and responsibilities to males and females. Secondly, that Muslim women have contributed a considerable amount to the welfare and enhancement of their societies. Since the advent of Islam up until the present time, there have been numerous female personalities – who have realized their Qur'ānic roles and responsibilities and they have excelled in their endeavours.

The introduction outlined the debate between the arguments against the equality of males and females in Muslim society and the assertion that the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* have granted equal rights to females. This discussion explained the need for focusing on the contribution of eminent Muslim women. This dissertation therefore intends to show that Muslim women are indeed capable of participating in the progress of their respective societies. They can also contribute to the enhancement of the entire Muslim *ummah*.

Any research on the role of women needs to address the issue of feminism. However, the contention of gender inequality does not apply directly to the Qur'ānic version of justice between males and females in society. This dissertation therefore views the feminist fight for equality as a delusion as these rights have been granted to Muslim women by the Qur'ān more than fourteen centuries ago already.

The feminist argument against veiling in Islam has been counteracted by the fact that an increasingly high amount of Muslim women are returning to *ḥijāb*. Moreover these



women are from the intelligentsia at Universities and other centres of higher learning. This proves that Muslim women have accepted *hijāb* as part of their identity (cf. Ahmed 1992: 224–225). Moreover, the return to Islamic dress highlights the need for a balance between religion and modernity. It combines traditional values and ideals with modern levels of education and employment. The Qur'ānic verse S33:59 also showed that Muslim women need to regard *hijāb* as part of the process of the elevation of their status in society.

The feminist approach to gender equality is also uncalled for as the Qur'ān regards males and females as having equal responsibility for separate roles in society. The main distinction it makes between them is in the physical realm and it is based on the equitable principle of fair division of labour (cf. S2:228 and S4:34).

The issue of polygamy does also not automatically make females unequal to males. This is especially the case when polygamy is practical according to the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. The specific pre-conditions and circumstances which allow polygamous relationships have to be considered here, as well as the injunction of practicing absolute justice between the spouses. Furthermore, the fact that a Muslim woman has recourse to terminate her marriage and also restrictions on a polygamous relationship by virtue of the marital contract both strengthen the position of women in the conjugal relationship.

The chapter on feminism and Islam has clearly stated that Muslim women require their own formula within the feminist domain. This could take the form of a revival of the Qur'ānic perspective on the status of women in Islam. It would then have to differentiate between the Islamic teachings and practice and tradition and custom which is historically motivated.

An article in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* portrays this dilemma. "There is no conflict between Islam – particularly with regards to the role of women – and modernization. Rather, the conflict is between traditional values and modernization. This can be extended to mean that there is a conflict between the basic teaching of Islam and prevailing traditional practices of Arab countries. To say this does not mean that everything about modernization and Islam are compatible. Rather, modernization and Islam are compatible as long as the former operates within the framework of the latter" (Jamal–al–Lail 1996:99)

In order to reinforce the argument that there is gender equality in Islamic society, various verses of the Qur'ān and texts of *aḥadīth* have been used. The Qur'ānic statement which most appropriately sums up this discussion is:


"And for women are rights over men  
Similar to those of men over women." [S2:226]

The Qur'ān also mentions the equality of men and women with regards to their rights, virtues, duties and merits. It says:

"For Muslim men and women,  
for believing men and women,  
for devout men and women,  
for true men and women,  
for men and women who give charity,  
for men and women who fast,  
for men and women who guard their chastity  
And for men and women who engage  
much in Allah's praise,  
For them has Allah prepared  
forgiveness and a great reward." [S33:35]

With these words in mind, the Muslim women of early Islam have proven to be dedicated and diligent in their support of Islam as their religion.

Leila Ahmed (1992:72) gives a summary of the contribution of early women to Islam. "Broadly speaking, the evidence on women in early Muslim society suggests that they characteristically participated in and were expected to participate in the activities that preoccupied their community; those included religion as well as war. Women of the first Muslim community attended mosques, took part in religious services on feast days and listened to Muhammad's discourses. Nor were they passive, docile followers but were active interlocutors in the domain of faith as they were in other matters. Thus the *ḥadīth* narratives show women acting and speaking out of a sense that they were entitled to participate in the life of religious thought and practice, to comment forthrightly on any topic, even the Qur'ān, and to do so in the expectation of having their views heard".



The contribution of Muslim women to society cannot be restricted. Especially if the life and work of contemporary women such as Zainab al-Ghazzālī, Maryam Jameelah, B. 'Ā'isha Lemu and Fatima Mernissi, to name but a few, are considered.

Yet there is still evidence in Muslim society, of women who are unhappy with their rights and responsibilities. These women see themselves as subservient to males in their own families – as well as males in society. Lamya Farūqi (1994:16) addresses the problem of lack of education amongst Muslim women in the following terms: "Their has been much progress in other fields (Muslim women are now becoming lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.), but Muslim women on the whole still lag far behind men in their status and their capabilities. In the Muslim world, the percentages of women getting a good education are less favourable and therefore the situation of the Muslim woman is more precarious. Despite Prophet Muhammad's command for the

education of every female as well as male, less than half of the young women in Muslim countries receive more than the most rudimentary education. Until this lack can be corrected, the insight and equipment to be independent will be weak in the Muslim woman whose rights and privileges granted to her by Islam will never be attained, and the fact of their existence will not even be realized."

The assertion that education plays a major role in the elevation of the status of women in society is also the subject of Maryam Jameelah's message. She has been quoted by Doi as follows: "The greatest defect of observant Muslims today is that they recite the Holy Qur'ān merely as a ritual without understanding what they are reading rather than regarding the sacred book as a practical manual of everyday conduct to be acted upon. If Muslims were taught to understand and above all, to translate into action, what they recite, the world would experience a veritable revolution which would put all previous revolutions to shame" (Doi 1989:188).

A return to the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) which are the primary sources of Islam, would ensure that women are granted their Qur'ānic status in Muslim society. In this way they would be motivated to contribute and become part of the global re-emergence of Islam as a religion of equality, peace and submission to the one God, Allah.

Doi goes on to quote Maryam Jameelah's closing words: "Since the primary responsibility for the rearing of children falls upon the mother, upon her rests the responsibility for the moral, spiritual and character training of future generations. Islamic education for women and the young girls who will be the future mothers is imperative, and illiteracy and ignorance should be combatted vigorously. Adult Islamic education for women must also be carried on by the Islamic movements. No Islamic movement can succeed if it neglects the proper education and training and

discipline of girls and young women. Ignorant and illiterate mothers cannot possibly rear their children and raise them to be good, effective, capable and intelligent Muslims, in the world today" (1989:188).

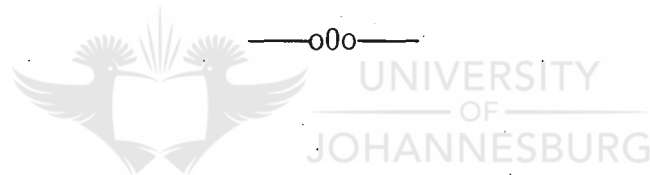
In these words is the essence of the direction of resurgence of women in Muslim society. Educating themselves and their societies is the principle force of action for Muslim women to embark upon. This will form a major part of the contribution of Muslim women to society. There is an overwhelming need for a movement whereby Muslim women can adjust their lives to live within the spirit of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. This fact is supported by the injunction that the Qur'ān is revealed for all time and that it is transcendent over space, location and era. The Qur'ān says:

"And recite (and teach)  
 What has been revealed  
 To thee of the Book  
 Of thy Lord: none  
 can change His words,  
 And none wilt thou find  
 As a refuge other than Him." [S18:27]

The contribution of these eminent Muslim women, who have been selected to represent the wide spectrum of females in Muslim society, prove that women have an important role to play. These women set the precedents for the moral and social value system of Islam. Muslim women today can learn from their experiences in order to effect a positive change in their status and position in Muslim society. Education plays a major role in this resurgence of Muslim women as Leila Ahmed (1992:72–73), Lamyā Farūqi (1994:16) and Maryam Jameelah (as quoted from Doi, 1989:188) have shown.

The contribution of this dissertation has been to highlight the social equality between males and females in Islam. It has also illustrated that women in particular can enhance Muslim society through education and commitment, without sacrificing their Islamic identities.

Much of the theory here has been drawn directly from the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. Moreover, the practical lives of the women selected to demonstrate the principles of equality between the sexes, as well as their individual achievements have demonstrated that Muslim women have indeed succeeded in making a significant contribution to society.



Bismillah-i-rahman-i-rahim

Maryam Jameelah  
c/o Mohammad Yusuf Khan  
15/49 Sant Nagar, Lahore  
54000 P A K I S T A N

Miss Suraiya Nawab  
P.O. Box 32241  
Braamfontein 2017  
Johannesburg  
SOUTH AFRICA

Thursday, August 15th, 1996

Dear sister-in-faith,



Assalaam alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh.

Thank you so very much for your kind and interesting letter.

It makes me very happy that you are so committed to Islam.

Concerning your thesis, I should like to be of whatever assistance to you that I can. As for your requirement for autobiographical material, this can be obtained in abundant detail from my following books and pamphlets:

1. WHY I EMBRACED ISLAM
2. INVITATION TO ISLAM: AN OPEN LETTER TO MY PARENTS
3. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MAULANA MAUDOUDI AND MARYAM JAMEELAH
4. My detailed autobiography in two parts:
  - (a) MEMOIRS OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN AMERICA (1934-1962)
  - (b) AT HOME IN PAKISTAN (1962-1989)

At least some of these should be available to you at any well-stocked Islamic bookshop. If after search of these bookshops, you can't get them, please let me know and I will try to send you the needful inshallah. My brief autobiographical account is as follows: I was born in New York on May 23rd, 1934, a fourth-generation American of German-Jewish origin. During my childhood and youth I attended the ordinary public schools in my locality which were thoroughly secular and American although on a much higher educational standard in those days (1939-1952) than the American public schools today. Then I attended New York University for two years (1953-1955) but was forced to discontinue my formal education due to illness without getting any degree or diploma. I spent two years in private and public mental institutions (1957-1959). In the spring of 1961 I formally embraced Islam in New York City. I lived alone in a women's hostel for one year (1961-1962). Began correspondence with Maulana Maudoodi (1960-1962) and at his request and invitation migrated to Lahore I was only three weeks in Maulana Maudoodi's home and family. and then went to his friends in a small town, Patteki for nearly a year. (1962-3) From April-August 1963 committed by the Maulana to another public mental institution in Lahore. On August 1963 married a wholetime worker of the JAMA'AT-E-ISLAMI, Lahore who already had another wife and several children. Became mother of four children, two boys and two girls. Maryam Jameelah's sons migrated to the U.S.A. in 1987. Younger married daughter lives in Lahore and eldest married daughter in Faisalabad. Many grandchildren. Besides wife and mother, free-lance writer and author on books in English about Islam, many articles, essays and reviews on books by other authors in English on Islam and the Muslim world. Author of the following books: ISLAM VERSUS THE WEST, ISLAM AND MODERNISM, ISLAM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, ISLAM AND ORIENTALISM, ISLAM VERSUS AHL AL KITAB PAST AND PRESENT: ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY, WESTERN CIVILIZATION CONDEMNED BY ITSELF 2 Vols, and my only attempt at fiction-writing: my Palestinian novel: AHMAD KHALIL; THE STORY OF A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE AND HIS FAMILY. Now I spend most of my literary activity writing book-reviews for THE MUSLIM WORLD BOOK REVIEW quarterly, U.K. The theme of nearly all my writings whatever form they take is the unhappy relationship between Islamic civilization and the West. My husband was the publisher of all my books. I stay at home most of the time and have done all my literary work at home. In recent years, the death of my mother from cancer in 1985 and my elderly father passed away of old age at aged 101 years. In this year in May 1996. In April 1996 my co-wife who had long suffered from diabetes passed away leaving me as the only wife with nine



step children in addition to my own children. I have few Pakistani friends: most of my friends are European and American converts to Islam like myself. Mostly I socialize within my husband's large extended joint family. Although I entered Islam in the atmosphere of political activist Islamic organizations, after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, my views on Islam changed radically. I spend a great deal of time alone in the house. The post keeps me in contact with the outside world.

Advancing in age, my friends are all rapidly dying off or else disabled with age: hence the need to find younger people to write to interested in Islam like yourself.

In brief this is my life and works: if you have any more questions, do not hesitate to ask me in your next letter.

Fatima Heeren (now Fatima Grimm) is one of my best and most cherished friends. We have been continuously corresponding since 1963 and we finally met in person in the winter of 1986. In case you wish to contact her for her autobiographical material, her address is:

Sister Fatima Grimm

Bauernrosenweg 27

D-22177 Hamburg

GERMANY

my other best friend who is a native American convert and has long worked for the cause of Islam in the U.S.A. author of several books in English on Islam under other names:

Mrs. Zeba Siddiqui

1201 Robertson Street

Fort Collins, Colorado

80524 U.S.A.

Hoping the above material will help and assist you in writing your valuable thesis. May I request a copy of this thesis when completed?

All best wishes and regards and hoping and praying that your thesis will be a great success:

Your Muslim sister,

Maryam Jameelah

## APPENDIX 2

Minneapolis, U.S.A.

20th Sept. 1996

Dear Sr. Suraiya,

Assalamu alaikum. I am sorry for the delay in following up with the information you want. I hope what follows will cover the basic facts.

I was born in Poole, Dorset in the U.K. in 1940 and went to school locally. When I was 13 my family (I have one sister) went to Australia for a year, by sea. It was my first time to see the world outside England, and it was a great experience. While in Australia I came across a book on Chinese philosophy which I found very interesting. I was brought up in the Church of England, going to church and Sunday School and a Church of England secondary school. However this was not due to any particularly strong religious interest in my parents. Rather it was considered a proper part of an English upbringing. Religion was not discussed at home, although my parents set a good moral example.

My interest grew in Chinese philosophy and poetry, which I found offered a new perspective on life. I began to realise that the teachings of the Church did not really give satisfactory explanations or answers to the fundamental questions of life.

When we returned to England I went back to my former school (Uplands School, Parkstone, Dorset) and left after my O levels, glad to get away from the stifling atmosphere of an English boarding school after the excitement of seeing the world.

I followed up reading about Chinese philosophy - particularly the Taoist writings - and then Buddhism.

Meanwhile I did a one-year secretarial course at the Oxford Technical college (we moved to a place near Oxford at this time). That was in 1956/7. I then took a

secretarial job at Oxford University Registry for a year. By this time my elder sister had gone to Canada, and in 1958 I went to join her. I stayed there for 2 years doing secretarial work at the University of Toronto.

I was not a typical modern teenager. I hated parties and never went to dances. I was more interested in my reading and at this time I added Hinduism (of the philosophical side) to my interests, as well as Western philosophy, in which I did an evening course at the University. I was searching for a belief and a way of life. I found elements of truth in all the faiths that I studied. But I had a problem with the view of some of the oriental religions that life and the material world were evils to be escaped from. My instincts told me that they were beautiful and good, and that it was only human beings who turned them bad.

I wanted to go and study in China or India, but at that time China was closed to foreigners, and I had no money to study in India. Moreover I only had my O levels. So, having saved some money I returned to England in November 1960 and registered at a Tutorial College. I did my A levels in 6 months in French and Italian and applied for a place at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. In October 1961 I started on a B.A. Hons. Course in Modern Chinese.

My ambition to study Chinese was at last achieved, but it coincided with a feeling that somehow I was never going to find the full truth in Chinese philosophy or Buddhism or Hinduism. I found myself without belief and not knowing where I was going. Like Dante whom I read in my Italian studies 'I found myself in a dark wood, from which the way out was obscure'. Was there a God? Was there a true religion in the full sense of its reliability in all areas? I did not know, and it was a disturbing condition.

The way opened in late October or November 1961 through an Indian whom I sat next to on a London bus. He started talking about Islam, and as we were getting off at the same stop the discussion continued. He went to his house and collected 2 books: Islam our Choice and another on the basics of Islam, and asked me to meet him after a week to give him my views on the books.

At first I was sceptical about the books, and only started to read them because I was going to be asked my views! I knew very little about Islam and had never considered it as a possibility because of the negative image it had "something like Christianity, but worse".

To my surprise however, when I started on the books, I began to find them interesting. I was given others, and through my Indian friend I began to meet other Muslims.

Then I was given the Qur'an with Yusuf Ali's translation.

As soon as I began to read it I sensed that this was the real thing. The clarity, the balance of this world and the hereafter, the sheer sense of authority, were convincing evidence that the Qur'an could not have been composed by Muhammad (SWA) or by any human being. Before finishing even Surat Al-Baqarah I decided to submit to Allah, and on 26th December 1961 I went to the Islamic Cultural Centre (now the Central Mosque) in London and took the Kalimah.

My parents were by this time used to my interest in other religions, so there was no hostile reaction, and they probably expected it to pass off. They were more concerned with the outward manifestations such as the headscarf, no pork or alcohol, etc. which are a bit awkward to explain socially.

I began to meet more Muslims including an Egyptian family studying in London University. They were very hospitable and in them I could see the Islamic family life in practice. They had been in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and were very knowledgeable about Islam. I learned a lot from them in discussion, and from further reading and attending Islamic lectures.

At this time in SOAS there were no facilities for Salat. I joined other students to form the Islamic Society of the College, and was its first Secretary. We were able to get a small room for prayer from the college authorities, and arranged for iftar to be served during Ramadan in one of the classrooms where the Muslim students could get together.

The following year I was also a founder member of FOSIS (Federation of Student's Islamic Societies in the UK and Eire).

Over the next 3 years I also got to know the man who eventually was to become my husband - Sheikh Ahmed Lemu from Nigeria, who was a student of History of the Near and Middle East in SOAS.

I completed my 4-year degree course in Chinese in 1965, and then did a 1-year Post graduate Certificate in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, specialising in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language.

By this time I had got to know Sheikh Ahmed well through the Islamic Society activities. In spite of differences of cultural background we understood each other very well. His Islamic knowledge and commitment were inspiring and his personality most endearing. We fell deeply in love, and by the time he finished his course and left in 1964 to return to Nigeria we were discussing the possibility of marriage. Two years later in 1966 when I finished my PGCE the wish was just as strong. We decided that I should go to Nigeria as a teacher to be able to see how I could adjust to Nigerian society, how he was on his own home ground, and whether I could cope with a polygamous marriage, as he was already married with several children. Neither of us wanted our marriage to be based on someone else's divorce.

So in August 1966 I left for Nigeria and took up appointment under the Government as a teacher of English at the School for Arabic Studies in Kano. That was the year of the first military coup and the counter-coup which led to the Biafra war. Things got a bit scary with the killing of Ibos in Kano in October 1966 and the following year the bombing of Kano Airport by Biafra planes.

However, apart from that the fighting moved entirely to the south east of the country and we only read about its progress in the newspapers.

By the end of 1967 we had decided to go ahead and get married. Sheikh was then Principal of the Arabic Teachers College in Sokoto. I was transferred to the Government Girls' College in Sokoto in early 1968 and we got married in Kano in April 1968. Shortly after this I became the Principal of the College, which was a boarding school and a whole new experience. I had to quickly learn enough Hausa to be able to communicate with junior staff. I was then 27. Fortunately with Sheikh's experience and advice I was able to grasp the job and stayed in it until 1976.

Our children were born in Sokoto - Nuruddeen in November 1970 and Maryam in January 1973.

In the course of my work I found myself baffled by the way Islamic studies was taught in Nigerian schools. It focused entirely on how to pray, how to fast with all the legal niceties of fiqh, but nobody taught the students why they should pray etc. or even why they should believe in Islam. They were just taught from the traditional Arabic books, which even the teacher could barely understand.

I asked the teacher to give me some of his periods every week so that I could give the senior girls a sort of bird's eye view of what Islam was all about. A Macmillan publishers representative saw my duplicated teaching notes and brought them out as my first book called "A students introduction to Islam" in about 1970.

In 1976 I was invited to give a lecture on Woman in Islam as part of the world Festival of Islam in London. I presented a paper as did Sr. Fatima Heeren from Germany, and both were brought out as a book, which is still in print from the Islamic Foundation.

Also in 1976 we moved to Minna in Niger State, after the division of the North-Western state into 2 parts.

I was transferred as Principal of the Women Teachers' College. Minna Sheikh, who had for some years served in the Inspectorate of Education was transferred to the judiciary first as Qadi and then as the first Grand Qadi of Niger State, heading the Shari'ah Court of Appeal.

In the W.T.C. I observed another problem with Islamic Studies. The students were expected to study its methodology, but there was no book. The teachers just had to make it up as they went along.

By this time I was getting tired of Government service with its inefficiencies and restrictions. In 1978 I resigned and spent a year working on a book called "Methodology of Primary Islamic Studies: A teacher's handbook".

In 1979 I took up a new appointment with the Islamic Education Trust. This requires a re-cap.

In 1969 Sheikh, myself and another man established this organisation based in Sokoto. Its first aim was to employ and provide free Islamic studies teachers to missionary schools where Muslim children were being converted to Christianity because there was no one to teach them Islam. By 1972 we also established an Islamic centre in Sokoto which ran an 18 month training course for Muslim da'wah workers.

When we moved to Minna we opened a new office and gradually established a national Headquarters. I was initially the Planning and Development Officer, and held various posts until I am now Director General. We have a bookshop, publications division, primary school, secondary school, women's (adult Islamic education) school, and branches in 7 states. We have also taken the lead in establishing the Nigerian Da'wah Co-ordination Council, which brings together about 30 Nigerian Islamic organizations for regular meetings to co-ordinate their da'wah activities.

To describe all the other IET activities would take too long. If I can find any reports I'll send them along.

In 1985 after discussions with interested Muslim women, a meeting was held to form a Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN). I was elected its first National Amirah for a 4 year term of office. I'll send some magazines which will insha Allah tell you about its activities and areas of focus. The organization now has

branches in most of the Nigerian states and in the Local Government Areas. It is accepted as the voice of Muslim women in Nigeria. After my 4 years as National Amirah I served 4 years as National Da'wah Officer and am now Chairman of FOMWAN Board for International Relations.

In 1993 as National Da'wah Officer I travelled with my Assistant Da'wah Officer across West Africa - to Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, and later to Cameroun. We met with women's Islamic groups and encouraged them to organize and federate as FOMWAN had done. We met with good response. We then invited their leaders to our Dec. 1993 Conference and took them by bus to visit our branches across Nigeria. Inspired by this they have now established FOMWASAL (in Sierra Leone) FOMWAG (in Ghana) FOMWAL (in Liberia) and the Muslim Women's Association of the Gambia with similar aims and structures.

We are now trying to make contacts in the Francophone countries of West Africa with a view to forming a Confederation of Women's Islamic Associations across the whole sub-region.



On the home front, our children have now grown up. Nuruddeen did his first degree in Agriculture at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and has just finished his masters in Resource Management at University of Edinburgh. He is now going to Jordan to improve his Arabic insha Allah. He is very active in da'wah. Maryam is married and studying with her husband in the U.S.

In the course of the past 20 years I have written other books, and some of my lectures have also been published as booklets as follows: (These are in addition to the 3 mentioned earlier)

**Books:** Junior Islamic Studies Series  
 Book 1 Tawhid and Fiqh  
 Book 2A Junior Qur'anic Arabic  
 Book 2B Lessons from the Qur'an  
 Book 3 Tahdhib and Sirah



(coming out next year in American edition by Iqra insha Allah)

Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools Books 1 and 2

Animals in Islam (also published in the U.S. by American Trust Publications)

A Degree above them

The Ideal Muslim Husband

The Ideal Muslim Wife

Islam and alcohol

A Critical Look at the Theory of Evolution

Laxity, Moderation and Extremism in Islam

(also published by IIIT in U.S. and U.K.)

Islamic Citizenship and Moral Responsibility

Steps on the Right Path (a collection of Hadith)

(these are what I can remember)

#### **Other activities:**

I was a member of the Islamic Studies Panel set up by the Nigeria Educational Research Council about 12 years ago to revise the Islamic Studies National Curriculum at Primary, Junior Sec. & Senior Sec. levels.

I am a founder Trustee of the ICII (International Council for Islamic Information) set up 2 years ago to focus on da'wah to non-Muslims. It is currently based in WAMY (Jeddah) and the Islamic Foundation (U.K.).

Over the years I have also visited a number of countries to attend seminars, workshops, give lectures etc. as follows: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Cameroun, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia. I also attended the Beijing Conference last year on behalf of FOMWAN. We conducted a workshop there at the NGO Conference.

**Current activities:**

I am currently working with my husband on a series of books on Islamic studies for Nigerian Primary schools. I am also to attend a meeting in October in Istanbul of the Committee on Woman and Child, insha Allah. It is an offshoot of IIRO, which is an offshoot of Muslim World League. An international conference for women is planned for next year by the Committee.

My husband has since retired as Grand Qadi and is the National President of the Islamic Education Trust. I owe him a tremendous debt of knowledge in all my writings.

I hope this gives you enough to work on.

I wish you every success with your project.

Wassalam.

Yours sincerely,



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(AISHA LEMU)

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